

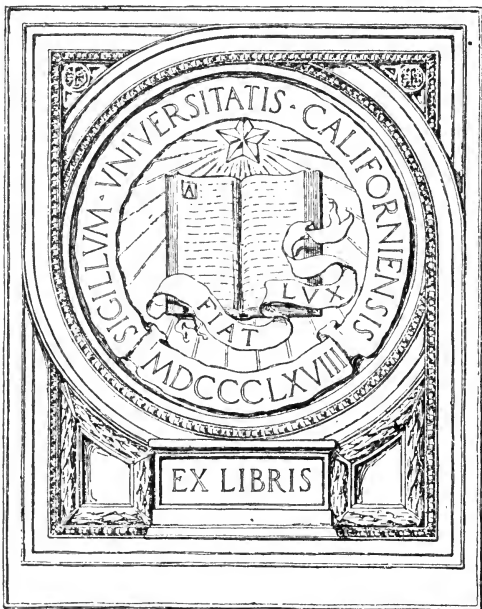
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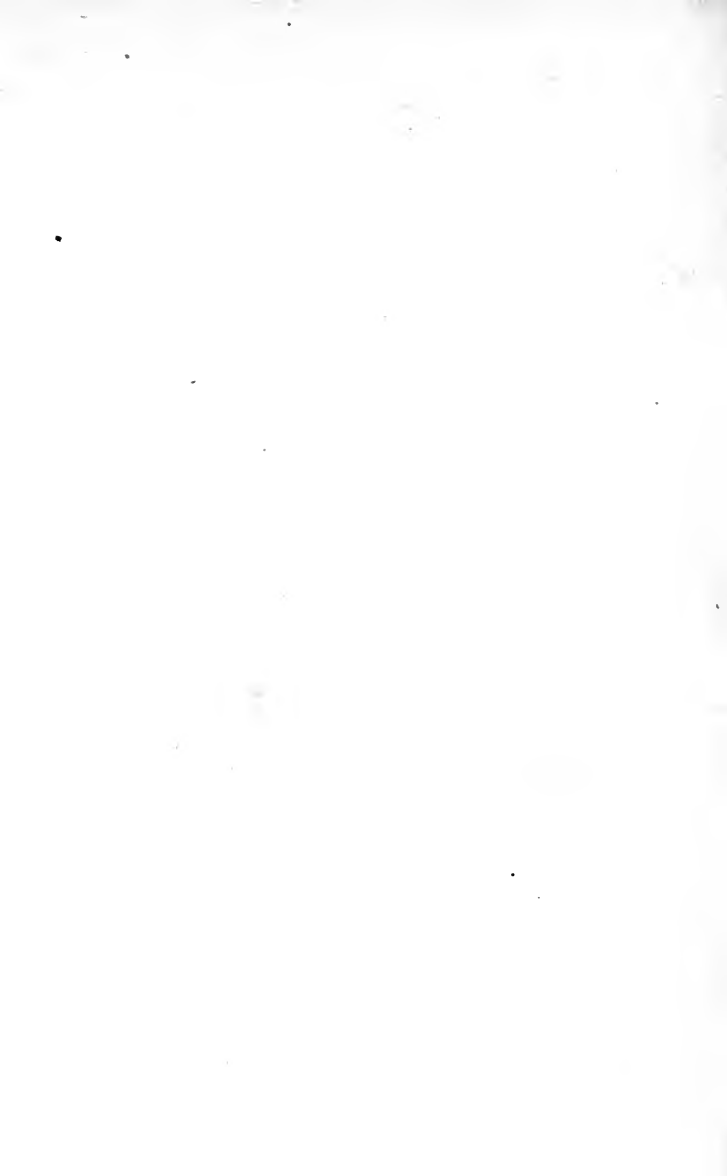
THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

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THE

THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

BY

HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD,

AUTHOR OF "THE AMBER GODS," "NEW-ENGLAND LEGENDS," ETC.



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THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

I.

THE garden lay sparkling under the earliest light of a June morning. A heaven everywhere a field of rose and azure soared over it; charming bird-songs trilled from its thickets; a breeze, that was only living fragrance, rifled its roses, swept up its avenues, and struck leaf and bough and blossom into light before it stripped them of their dewdrops in a shower. The Triton at the lower end of the little lake sent up a shaft of water-streams from his horn to catch the sunbeams and sprinkle them over the surface beneath, and beds of faintly blue forget-me-nots crept out to meet the pickerel-weed and lily-pads, — blue flags, and bluer weed, and waxen-white lilies just unclasping their petals, with here and there a floating ball of gold among them, — where the breeze dipped again in a shining ripple, and weeds and

flags and lilies rocked and swayed before it. On the one side, the sweet-brier, climbing a pear-tree to reach the robin's nest, looked back with a hundred blushing blossoms, and blew a breath of delight to the damask-rose on the other. The damask said good-morning to the moss-rose; the moss-rose to the red; the red would have passed on the cheerful salutation, but the pale-white rose, upon its lofty stem, had been awake all night, had looked into the sick man's chamber, and learned what the ruddy-checked flowers, which hung their heads and went to sleep with the birds, were not to know. Nevertheless, a red-winged blackbird, lighting there and leaving, shook it so that half its petals fluttered away in pursuit; a little piece of jewel-work of a humming-bird darted by to join the frolic; a blue-bird dropped a measure of melody from the spray where he was tilting, and followed after. Every thing, in all the bright and blooming garden, moved and glanced and blushed and glittered. Every thing spoke of life and joy and hope and health: nothing spoke of sad secrets or ill deeds. Every thing told of beauty and breath, the luxury of living: nothing told of death, or desolation.

A window-casement, looking out upon the garden, had been ajar all night, perhaps: the fresh morning breeze had pushed it open now, had brushed the curtain from its fastenings, and lifted it high in the air within, while rioting round the room. You could see through this open window that the appointments of the room were costly: the carpet was like a soft and springy depth of moss; the bedstead was a mass of carved mother-of-pearl, its snowy silken curtains, though heavy with their golden fringe, yet fluttered and dappled by the wind; on the wall a solitary picture, a portrait set in a panel of unburnished gold.

It was a woman's face there, a fair, white woman, with hair of palest tint, — so white was she that you saw the tracery of blue veins upon her temples and her throat: the large eyes were scarcely bluer. Though dark brows and darker lashes lent those eyes shadow and depth, they had an inner splendor of their own, a light that seemed to burn from the brain: they were strong and searching eyes, rejoicing eyes, that said although the heart should break the spirit would be glad and safe. But the mouth was another thing; for albeit its lips were like some

pulpy fruit, yet the smile that played around its corners was full of melancholy. A face that blended all its contradictions into one perfect charm, a face to lure on its victims, — to smile and smile, and murder while it smiled.

There might have been other objects in the room, but they were not in the line of the window; one only, a silver tripod, bearing a globe of red roses, was to be seen. A level sunbeam smote through them till they seemed to blaze with crimson fire, and, dyed and suffused with all the ripe, rich color, the radiance passed on and lay in a stain of crimson glory on the pillow, as if it did not dare to touch the ashen frozen face beside it there; or as if it spurned to simulate the deeper, darker stain where the sleeper lay, — lay with his ghastly countenance turned toward that portrait still, with his glazed eye open on it even now, while no shadow fell between them, and nothing stirred in all the room save the bright breeze blowing in, tossing draperies and playing idle pranks around the form that lay unconscious and not to be stirred by its wayward will, — the form that lay as a murdered man lies, a man murdered in his sleep, a dead man straight and stark upon his bed with stiffened blood about him.

The room where this hideous sight was to be seen in the midst of so much splendor was on the ground-floor: two great fir-trees stood up on either side the casement to guard it, but there was open view to whomsoever passed that way.

A lady came stepping down the marble stairway on the hither edge of the terrace,—a tall and shapely woman with a gracious presence of her own: a cambric handkerchief was loosely tied over the locks of palest tint. She lifted her gown from the dew and passed on; she was not bound toward the open casement; the face she showed the morning sun was the face of the portrait, the same features cut as if upon an opaque gem, the same cream-white skin, but the eyes were lustreless to-day and sodden with much weeping.

Before the lady was quite lost to sight another person had entered the bright enclosure: it was the gardener, making along with his spade across his shoulder. His way lay directly before the open casement; he passed it by with a half-glance behind him; started, after a few steps, as if he had but just understood the sight he saw, went back, put down his spade, went in. He was within perhaps a single minute: when he came out he was whiter than the thing he had left; he

caught a glimpse of the lady's garment as it fluttered round a hedge, and ran breathlessly after her. She turned at the sound of his footsteps.

"Mr. Beaudesfords"—he cried.

"Has sent for me?" she asked eagerly.

"Mr. Beaudesfords"—he began again, and stopped, incapable, whether terror dazed him, or some commanding instinct stifled the words, and gave him others first. "O madame! this note is for you. I took it from his hand," he cried.

She reached her own for it, not heeding the dark, dry imprint on a corner of the crumpled scrap, gave one glance at an enclosure it contained, and held it then with no more quiver visible in her fingers than if they had belonged to a statue of moulded clay. "Well, McRoy," she said, "what disturbs you? What else?"

The gardener looked at her amazedly: her repose seemed to petrify him. "And this, madame," said he, slowly opening his hand before her as if he could do it no faster. "This little knife!" His teeth chattered in his head.

"It is mine," she answered him. "You have often seen me use it here. Where did you find it?"

"It is the knife with which Mr. Beaudesfords

was last night murdered in his bed!" he exclaimed.

The white face flushed, flushed rose and redder, till the swollen veins stood purple: then it grew deathly, and the lady staggered and caught McRoy's hand for support. "What!" she tried to say, "Beaulesfords" —

"Ay, madame," he replied, "murdered. God! how could ye?"

She seemed either not to hear him, or else to find it impossible to comprehend him. "Murdered!" she gasped again, staying herself only by that shaking hold upon his arm.

"Ay, ay, that's it: no more nor less,—just murdered! But that's your knife: take it, hide it! For hark ye, Mrs. Beaulesfords! 't was your hand closed my May's eyes,—his own are staring wide open by the same token. And I'll keep your secret."

Mrs. Beaulesfords was moving as the man spoke,—moving with trembling feet, giving herself no time to listen to him, to glance at him, to be appalled by him. "Alarm the house!" she was hoarsely crying as she fled. "Send Dr. Ruthven here! Rouse them! Come, rouse them all!" And she swept past him, strengthening herself,

in a terrible sort of grandeur, like one who encounters fate and defies it.

The man gaped after her ; then gulped down whatever words he had been about to utter, and ran in the direction of Dr. Ruthven's abode, having the power to obey, but not to think, too stupefied to say even to himself that here was a woman whose course was to choose without a tremor.

Mrs. Beaudesfords shivered, but never paused, as she stepped across the sill of the open casement. Now it was clear daylight. Last night, and with another purpose, she had crossed it stealthily, and in the dark. She seized the bell-rope, and rang a peal that might have awakened the dead themselves, before she turned to view the object that was so soon to be exposed to all. She appeared to be in a measure stunned by what she had heard, as if she either knew it too well already, or else did not fairly believe it. The sight might have made a stronger woman sicken. As she caught the stolid stare of those icy eyes, her limbs failed, and she fell senseless to the floor.

It was only a moment, and the room was full ; servants, sisters, mother, clustering together, and almost as the summons of the bell had found

them. While these hung, terror-struck, over the bed, breaking out in a bewildered wailing, others rubbed her hands and temples. The will that so seldom swerved came to her relief. She heard a clanking kind of step on the hall pavement, and she stood upon one side of the dead man's pillow when Major Gaston stood upon the other.

Gaston did not utter a syllable. He stooped and lifted the leaden hand, and let it fall again; and then he looked at her, bending there before him as frozen and as pale as the face below. Perhaps even in such a moment she could feel that his gaze was on her; but what matter? With that writing secured, she was safe. She might be a murderer, since, doubtless, there had been seasons when in her heart she had desired this death,—as much a murderer as the one who used that little knife which a moment since she had found herself still holding and had flung away like an adder. Twice and thrice a murderer she would rather Gaston thought her, than once a false wife. Her husband's honor lay in that scrap of paper hidden on her heart. She felt it as she breathed. Gaston should never know what words were written there. She looked up and met his gaze with a steady glance of those triumphant eyes of hers,

triumphant even over death ; and, while she looked, the way was opened for Dr. Ruthven.

The old physician, shocked by his summons, since he had left his patient in a comfortable state on the previous evening, bent over the bed a brief space, and gave a dozen breathless directions. "This knife, eh ! The radial artery opened ?" said he then. "Delicate operation for a night attack, and a house full of people. Too delicate, too much so, it couldn't have been. A night attack ? He has not been an hour dead !" And in the moment ere they could obey his orders he had the gardener in to point out the exact position in which the knife was found. Gaston took the sharp toy from him, balancing it on his fingers, examining the minutely carved handle with its crusted stain. "Humph ! Just as I thought," muttered the Doctor. "A little gash to let eternity in on a man's soul. Sorry for him ! ah, I'm sorry for Beaudesfords ! It may be yet — Mrs. Beaudesfords, dear lady, this is no place for you."

She had pushed back the little stand with its portfolio and pencils from the head of the bed, unperceived in so common an action. There had been need for some one to be calm, since all the

other women were shrieking and wringing their hands. But now, slowly sinking on her knees, and vainly endeavoring to hinder it, she was shaking the bed with her hard, dry sobs. The Doctor lifted her, and half helped, half bore, her from the room. Gaston never stirred.

II.

WHEN the room had been quite cleared of the weeping and wailing throng there, — weeping and wailing, not only from the loss of a dear companion and kind master, but from the suddenness, the horror, and a hundred hysterical emotions, — Major Gaston still retained his position beside the pillow, now half in the shadow of a fallen curtain, and still looked down upon the face that was turned toward the portrait, as if that pictured eye it was that had frozen the man to stone. His own glance followed that dead stare, and rested on the beautiful breathing canvas where the painted woman seemed to lean from the frame and command both dead and living to her worship. To her worship? Worship her who, finding her husband as she had found him, still keeps her powers about her, rings up the house, and neither shrieks nor raves in maniac fashion? Strong nerves were hers.

Strong nerves were needed for this work last night. Worship her who—in his soul he believed it—loved another man, that man himself, Gaston; loved with all her passionate nature,—nature as proud as passionate, able to lend itself to crime, never to shame; who was beloved again; who knew she was beloved again,—for had not Gaston's every pulse, every breath, every glance, this three months past, assured her?—whose husband had seen the whole; who by all her hopes in life had reason to wish him where he lay; who was the first to find him where he lay? They who hide can find. Worship her who—once before he had seen it—failed to blanch at the sight of blood, when, without a tremor, she held McRoy's May in her arms, as the child died amidst the red torrents spurting under the surgeon's steel; who had lopped the garden roses, not a week ago, with that little knife of hers, and had whetted it on the edge-stone of the lake till it glittered in its haft,—the haft in the likeness of an ivory hand and arm: what a red stain there was on that tiny hand now! And on the other hand—her hand?

Major Gaston could not have gazed on that canvas before him, on that face with its enchant-

ing sweetness, and have thought such thoughts : they were not thoughts of his thinking at all, but phantasms that thronged over him as if he were walking through a dark, dank cavern, and all its flitting bats and vampires flapped their wet wings in his face. He remembered Dr. Ruthven's declaration, when he entered ten minutes since, like some apocryphal thing he had read and half forgotten a score of years ago, nor did he notice what the man was about there now with the sweat on his forehead. Not he to himself, but something far outside, seemed to say that however much in friendship or in zeal the family physician strove to keep an ancient name from shame, yet murder had been done,—something far outside, a thousand leagues outside ; for as for him, gazing at the picture of that woman's face, the currents of his heart, mounting higher and higher, kindled their flame on his sallow cheek ; all his blood beat toward her : in spite of sin, or shame, or life, or death, he loved her ! But Gaston could not have declared himself conscious even of this : he stood like an automaton, with every spring of his being played on by this moment's cruel hand. The only thing of which he was distinctly aware while he looked on the

lovely face, and the dead man lay beneath, was the burden of a rude ballad that once the little May sung to the three together,—a song that could have naught to do with such a scene as this:—

“Earl Castle’s wife came down the stair,
And all her maids before her, O ;
As soon as they saw her well-fared face,
They cast the glamor o’er her, O.”

When the physician had tried vainly all his usual methods of resuscitation, and had despatched his assistants on the last resort, he came and laid his hand on Gaston’s arm. “You did not believe me when I said this was no night attack of an assassin?” said he,—for the presence of death did not so much awe the man who dealt in it, and who knew it only as a kind event that loosed the indefinable bond between soul and body. “You did not believe me, sir?”

“God forbid that I should doubt you!” shuddered Gaston.

“My friend,” said the Doctor, taking his hand, and wringing it till it ached, “since I have often spoken with you plainly for your soul’s health, let me tell you that there are different ways of committing the same crime: this is one with

accessories. Whosoever deed it was,—whosoever,—this hand I clasp, this hand of Arnold Gaston's, is just as guilty as if it had driven home the knife!" Then, at the sound of his horse's feet, Dr. Ruthven went out hurriedly and left Gaston alone.

III.

WITH his victim. Gaston had been fond of fancying himself the victim of Beaudesfords. How could it be that fate had so suddenly turned the tables ?

They two were boys together at the same school, mates in the same barrack : if they had had no sorrows to share, they had been one in every pleasure. Gaston was a poor man with his way to clear ; but had Beaudesfords — millionaire from his cradle — been born of Danæ's golden shower itself, he could not have lavished wealth around him more loosely. So prodigal that every one partook of his bounty, his friend could scarcely avoid basking in the same sunshine that he did. But Gaston was a proud man, as well as a poor one : he liked to accept nothing without rendering its equivalent ; and it was partly for that reason that Beaudesfords, while squandering his income when by himself, had reduced his personal expen-

ditures to a Spartan level when in the society of Gaston. Gaston had been the first of his class: Beaudesfords, the second, looked up at him with unmixed admiration. Beaudesfords had resigned his commission: Gaston had retained his, and in the frontier service had won a scar that Beaudesfords, with joyous envy, considered a superior decoration to the cross of the Legion of Honor. Gaston, with a somewhat gloomy tinge of temperament, almost a stranger to success, hitherto chained to his profession, and devoured by stifled and unsatisfied ambitions, was regarded by Beaudesfords — young, rich, handsome, followed by troops of friends — as the one person in the world with whom he would be willing to exchange identities and circumstances. In return Gaston loved him truly: he could do no less.

The two were on a fishing excursion round the coast at the time they together met Catherine Stanhope. The wind had fallen, and they were rowing their heavy boat round a long ledge of rocks before making its night-harbor, when they saw this woman standing on the extreme point of the ledge looking out to sea. Her gown and a loosened tress of fair hair fluttered on a little eddy of faint air; but she herself stood in the

sunset light unmoved, a marble statue flushed and tinted by whatever foreign light was shed upon it, — as if her beauty were a beacon to warn all sailors from so dangerous a coast. So beautiful was she, indeed, that the two friends raised their oars by one accord while they gazed, turned away, and looked back again to make sure that it was no deceit of weary eyes. At her knees another figure sat, a younger girl, only less lovely, but in utter contrast to the cool command of her who stood: this small and clear dark face was flushed, its eyes were fired, its short rings of raven hair were wet with the dew of terror; for, coming to gather samphire, Rose and her sister had been cut off from shore by the rising tide. Rose cowered there half unobserved; but it is safe to say that of the two friends one not sooner than the other was wild with love of Catherine Stanhope.

“Beautiful, by God!” exclaimed Gaston.

“By all the gods!” cried Beaudesfords, turning on his seat.

“When was such a group seen before, — two such women” —

“Ah! I saw but one,” said Beaudesfords.

“And yet the picture would be incomplete without that carnation on the darker cheek.”

Beaudesfords laughed while he lowered his oar, as if there had been disclosed a flash of his good fortune in the future that eclipsed all the past had given, since his friend had had time to see the darker cheek, and preferred to linger on the sight. The veil which Arnold Gaston's reserve for ever wrapped about his emotion served him in ill stead that night: a frank word, perhaps, and the end had been otherwise. With the sound of that laugh, Catherine's eyes fell from their steady gaze where her soul had stayed prepared for all the ventures of eternity; and she beheld the two,—the back of one as he bent over his oar, the dark, eager face of the other. This life again with all its warmth and bliss rushed before her: all past joys, all future possibilities, rose in a splendid hope and gleamed for her out of Arnold Gaston's eyes, as he gazed in her face, while the other oar dipped and glanced, rowing steadily towards her. A cry would have risen to her lips, but it died there: she only held out her arms with an imploring gesture, and awaited him. It was his arms that lifted to receive her as the boatside grated; but as instantly he had dropped them, had sprung out on the weed-imbedded rock, had passed Rose across to

Beaulesfords like a child, and then, as if the same grasp had been profanation of the other, had held her steady by her strong white hands—he saw how strong and white they were, each lineament and curve was printed on his perception in as brief an instant as that in which the sun sets down every line and shadow—as she stepped across, had followed her, and pushed off again with a laboring oar out of the way of the strong current that rippled round the rock. But if Beaulesfords ever thought about that swift scene in its relation to any other than himself and Catherine, he only remembered that it was Rose whom Gaston had saved the first.

Rose began to cry. The statelier and serener woman calmed her with a soothing touch.

“Mr. Beaulesfords”—said she.

He turned in astonished silence, taking off the cap and throwing back his tumbling yellow hair.

“You have forgotten me—Catherine Stanhope.”

“Never!” he cried.

“But it is!” averred the little one, looking up, her face a-glitter with tears and blushes. “And I am Rose.”

“That you are!” said Beaulesfords, gallantly.

“Rose in Bloom, herself. But Catherine? Do you suppose I could have forgotten you if I had ever seen you? When I knew Catherine Stanhope she was fifteen and *farouche*.”

What lovely woman ever forgave a slight to her beauty, past or present? What unconscious one ever favored such bold addresses? Beaudesfords learned that fact by an intuition. “And now you are affronted,” said he; “and I have no claim upon your good-nature, since it was Gaston and not I that brought you into the boat.”

Gaston was running up the sail to meet the rising breeze: the presence of these two women, each so bewilderingly beautiful, was, to all appearance, a matter to him of not half the moment of the capful of wind which he essayed to catch.

“You used to speak of Gaston when you stayed with us,” said Rose, under her breath.

“He is Major Gaston now,” replied Beaudesfords.

Just then the sail swung lazily round, and left Gaston standing dark and clear against the setting sun, while he bowed in answer to this introduction. Catherine turned, and again their gaze met. Beaudesfords used to speak of his friend as of a being impassible as the hills: he would have

spoken in other terms had he often felt the heat of the fires that seethed within. But who would have guessed them as Gaston raised his hand to try the wind, saying, "Another tack, and we just make it!"

For the rest of the quiet sail no one wasted many words,—Rose quivering with excitement, Catherine too grateful for her escape, too deeply touched. Beaudesfords had mercy on them, and spent his impatience on the boat as it wound in and out a serpentine channel to the shore. But perhaps none of them ever forgot that tranquil motion on the still, broad stream, in which the sunset colors burned and drowned, and over which the evening star stole out large-rayed and calm: evening bells came floating off from the distant town, the light-house lamps began to sparkle, a warm land-breeze caught them up and baffled them with flower-scents for a time; then a salt smell of the sea was upon them in the land-locked river-mouth, and a light and rushing east wind bore them up the sand, just as the night, with all its flitting fire-flies up, had settled into duskiest, warmest depth.

It was Beaudesfords who helped them out. Then Catherine turned again and held her hand

to Gaston. "I shall not thank you," said she, "because there are no words for such a service." If Major Gaston tingled to his fingers' ends as he resigned that hand, none there would have known it.

"But you must come up with us," cried the little Rose. "Mamma will never forgive us if we let you go. She will want to kiss the hands that helped us. Oh! you saved our lives, you know!"

"We never thought of any thing less," responded Beaudesfords, taking no notice of her grateful phrases, for the extremity had not been serious, and doubtless other boats, in a port where they were always darting about the water, would have come to the rescue in season: it only happened to be Beaudesfords' that came the first. "We never thought of any thing less when we set out," said he; and so, ringing the changes on old times with question and answer, they had gone up the steep bank to the Stanhope cottage and entered, and, in view of the alarm their protracted stay had caused, had received a greeting from the mother and her other daughter of welcome and reproaches, kisses and tears. Gaston viewed the scene from the doorway, — Beaudesfords mingling in it, and with assumed simplicity coming in for his share of all; and perhaps the glow of the

moment gave a warmer tinge to the feelings of the Stanhopes in his regard than a year's endeavor might have done, though he had once been almost a child of the house himself.

Mrs. Stanhope was rather a stately woman: her white skin Catherine had, her dark eyes Rose. She was still a pretty woman, and had sufficient spirit to cause the household to cluster round herself for a centre. Her three children obeyed her now as they did in their infancy; that is to say, Catherine implicitly, Caroline petulantly, Rose not at all. She was an ambitious woman, desiring wealth; and, since it was unlikely that Caroline would ever leave her, she intended that the marriages of the others should be brilliant enough to cover her deficiency. Her husband had been one of Beaudesfords' guardians until his death. A widow now, and with a small support, she knew the value of money, particularly of Beaudesfords',—the accumulation of a long minority: she knew the value of beauty, too, as a merchantable article, though doubtless she would have rebuked such a suggestion with scorn. Nevertheless she had sighed that in her seclusion the beauty of her daughters should go for nothing; had more than once wondered if Beaudes-

fords, taking his pleasure round the world, would never remember his home of a single year sufficiently to seek it again; and was not at last a whit surprised when one morning, after he had been a week in the place, Beaudesfords—who had come in and was scratching off some letters on her writing-table—looked up and said to her, “Mamma Stanhope, I am going to marry Catherine.”

“With all my heart,” said she.

“Do you think Catherine will marry me?” said Beaudesfords then, a little shyly and slyly.

“Oh! that,” said Mamma Stanhope, to make the prize more precious,—“that is quite another thing. Catherine is whimsical: I cannot say. You surely are the one to know.”

“I surely do not know. This morning she is kind to me, this evening she is haughty, to-morrow she forgets I exist. You see, Mamma Stanhope, if I had—if I were like Gaston”—

“Gaston, indeed!” cried madame. “I will bring her here this moment!”

“No, no, no! That would never do. But you can judge, at least, if she would favor such a suit. I have so little to offer in myself.”

“Is that Rose calling me?” asked the wily

woman. "The child troubles me more every day than Catherine ever did in her whole life. Wait here, and finish your letters. I will be back directly."

Catherine and her sisters were alone in the little sewing-room: they were plotting a gown that should answer at once for the street, the evening, and dinner. The mother entered, and stood a moment watching them before she despatched the other two on some opportune errand.

"You will not need to turn a breadth three times before saying which side is the less shabby any more," said she then. "Beautesfords wishes you for his wife, Catherine." She would not have played her cards so poorly had she felt a trifle less exultation over her prospects, or dislike of their employment.

"Me?" exclaimed Catherine, lifting her head from where she stooped, while the blood blossomed out in two red roses on her cheeks. "Beautesfords!" She sprang to her feet. "When he has not known me a week!" she cried. "Does he think, because his purse is full, he comes into this house as if it were a market of Circassian girls and orders his slave home?"

Beautesfords had not finished his letters,

neither had he written a word of them: he sat there stripping his quill in pieces, when suddenly the doorway darkened, and Catherine stood there as blazing and brilliant as if a meteor had opened and let her out,— a baleful meteor.

Beaundesfords rose pale to confront her. He was her mate for beauty as he stood, that was clear: his stature nobler than hers, his profile like that on those coins where the conquering Alexander had his own likeness struck in the name of Apollo, his gray eyes with no more quailing in them than an eagle's, the clustering brightness of his hair,—she saw it all as she stood there, her lips apart to speak, but the words rising to them so bitter that they were not fit to say. Beaundesfords, too, had a sharp arrow on the string; but in a moment he had conquered his indignant feeling, and he went forward, and taking her hand, while she was too much surprised to refuse it, led her to a seat.

“You are angry with me, Catherine,” said he then, “because I have wished to share my life with you, whatever there is in it either of sorry or glad; because you had enchanted a week so that I would have the same enchantment spread over years; because in this week I had found

your companionship so sweet that I wanted it for ever!" But her lids fell, and her face grew dull, for she cared little for compliment, — nothing for it from Beaudesfords, whom she remembered as a careless, cheerful lad, while her sequestered life had fostered every romantic tendency towards the unknown and heroic. "Very well," continued Beaudesfords: "it is possible you can pardon me, and I will keep the rest to myself. Of course it was presumptuous. I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me!" Then Beaudesfords laughed. He was a merry fellow, and had never known what failure was: he hoped still. "To keep it from being before me," said he, "I must go away. But not till I feel forgiven. Don't let me tire you with complaint. Do I look like a disappointed lover?"

"No, Mr. Beaudesfords," exclaimed Catherine, her chance having come, "but like a disappointed purchaser!"

"Before God!" cried Beaudesfords, "I never thought of my money! I will give it all to Gaston, if that will make me a lighter weight in the contest!"

What a flame leaped into Catherine's eyes! "If Major Gaston had the half of it, he would" —

“Would what?” said Beaudesfords, in that debonair way of his that seemed to her insufferable familiarity.

“Would never woo his wife in such a fashion!”

Beaudesfords bent and touched her hand with his lips. “Good-by,” said he. “It is the kiss of peace. Since the lips are forbidden me” — he hesitated half an instant, as if his own words were a temptation to him; then lest, before he knew what he was about, he should stoop and hold and make that mouth his own, — that fragrant and delicious mouth, — he turned upon his heel and went out.

He came again though in the afternoon, and Gaston with him. They had picked up a little girl with her basket of wild strawberries to sell, and had brought her up to empty it on Mamma Stanhope’s table.

“We have sold such a boat-load of fish, and lobsters, and crabs,” said Beaudesfords, “that we can afford to buy some berries. What a work-a-day world it is where Gaston is!” he said, throwing himself back in the great chair he had chosen, and his hands clasped behind his head. “Such idle hours as those officers have in their forts and frontiers — Gaston could never

endure it, and so got a furlough to come and earn his living. I suppose I ought to go away," continued Beaudesfords, glancing half mischievously at Catherine, for he was well enough aware that all the family knew of his morning's mishap, and he had taken care that Gaston did. "But look at my net profits of to-day," and he threw two gold pieces on the table; "and Gaston has as much more,—at least he had, before he bought the berries,—honest earnings. Do you think we shall leave such a placer?" And he began to troll out, "Who 'll buy my caller herrin'?" in as heart-whole a manner as ever a costermonger cried his wares.

"Do you mean that you have actually sold your fish?" questioned Rose, with her usual license.

"Why not?"

"In an age of bargain and sale," added Gaston, with something strange in his tone. Catherine raised her eyes once more, and they met those of Gaston, in a long-suspended glance. She seemed mutely to answer a mute question: the whole world might be at vendue, but she, at least, was neither to be bought nor sold. A moment after and she was wondering at herself: wondering how it was that in a single week this

silent man, whose reticence, perhaps, fascinated one into discovering his thoughts; this plain man, whose scar caused you always to look into his eyes that you might not see it; this lonely man, without a relative, and with no nearer friend than Beaudesfords on earth,—had already become, as it were, a part of her own being.

That day had not been the happiest one, on the whole, of Catherine's life. Her mother had met her outbreak with a stern sense of injury and unbending disapproval. Caroline had awarded it no more favor: only little Rose — she would always be little, though she were a woman grown — had woven a chain of pansies, and hung them on Catherine's hair, like the benoitions of after-days, whispering a host of naughty consolations; and Catherine — somewhat martyred, picturing to herself that unvarying success in life which had so spoiled Beaudesfords that he had never dreamed of a woman's withstanding him, and had dared his whole hope on a single risk — had made a noble relief to her picture out of Gaston, proud, sad, and majestic.

But when Gaston met her gaze just now, his heart beating at first so exultantly, what made it

sink as quickly? Was it with an idea that he was an honest man, deeply in debt, and with a sufficient burden on his shoulders to meet his obligations? Was it with a conviction that his great schemes and the work he had projected for himself would not endure the rivalries of domestic life? It could never have been with a sense that he was a selfish man shrinking from deprivations and responsibilities!

"Yes, we sold them," continued Beaudesfords. "Every fish had a piece of money in its mouth."

"Just as much as if it had been caught in the brooks of the miracles," said Gaston.

"So you see we are inevitable as long as a sturgeon leaps in the river,—at least *I* am: Gaston has some ridiculous idea of departure."

"Why, I thought Major Gaston had a furlough," said Rose, who had brought her little macaw to the table, and was teasing her with strawberries, thereby diverting the attention of Mamma Stanhope, who coupled the claws and beak with rents in her damask.

"A long furlough," said Gaston: "I have left the army for a situation in the civil-engineer service, that I may pay my debts and draw a free breath before I die."

“Mamma says good people do not get into debt,” said the more than half-spoiled Rose. “That is the reason I have such a bill at the milliner’s. Good people are so stupid !”

“You relish a suspicion of wickedness ?” asked Gaston. “It does heighten the lights.”

“Since Rose is not one of them,” said Beaudesfords, “we will admit that good people are stupid.”

“And so are successful ones,” said the little witch. “They stand like Beaudesfords,” deprecating offence with her pretty smile, “in such a glare of sunshine as to be commonplace ; like a picture without perspective. Give me Hassan of the Desert, — somebody with a battle to fight inside or outside ; for my ideal is ” —

“Grand, gloomy, and peculiar,” laughed Beaudesfords.

“But you, Major Gaston ” —

“I am no darling of good-fortune certainly.”

“Ah ! you are envious of Beaudesfords, I see. *Peste !* I had much rather be a hero !” and she sent the macaw fluttering and screaming to his perch, having covered Catherine sufficiently with her chatter.

Beaudesfords laughed his assent again.

“What are you talking of, Rose?” cried Mamma Stanhope.

“She has been reading French novels,” said Caroline. “And you are obliged to go at once, Major Gaston?”

“Not necessarily, but I have some preparations” —

“And two months to make them in,” said Beaudesfords. “He is to explore one of the great Central-American routes; and the expedition — himself and a couple of Caribs — does not start until August. Do you remember when my guardian took me on his pilgrimage down among the thunderbolted hills and arrowy rivers of the isthmus? How wild Catherine was to go!”

“Green and salad days,” said Catherine, opening her lips for the first time since his entrance.

“We told her women were in the way: they could never stand, like Cortez and his men, ‘silent upon a peak in Darien.’”

“That was the time you found your coppers?” asked Gaston.

“Your what?” said Caroline, in her thirst for useful knowledge.

“Didn’t my guardian ever tell you? In one of the old Spanish towns they were coppering a

ship ; and among the material, do you think, were a half-dozen of the rarest paintings on copper, stripped from some cathedral. I bought them for a song ; and one — a St. Veronica, I fancy — is such a likeness of Catherine, as she sits there, that I swear the Inquisition couldn't get it away from me !”

Gaston's brow darkened. “Don't you see it ?” asked Beaudesfords.

“It is plain enough !” returned the other, making his excuse for gazing till it lightened all his gloom.

“Oh !” cried Rose, “to tell a lady that her face is plain enough !”

“Suppose you come and see,” said Beaudesfords, impetuously. “Mamma Stanhope, it is not a day's sail up the river. Take the demoiselles and go up to Beaudesfords to-morrow with us : with a fair wind, and the tide serving at day-break, we shall be there in time to dine, and come down on the midnight ebb. I want you to see how I have carried out my guardian's plans in the improvements. You have never been there since he and you came together to bring the forlorn little wretch that you found crying and kicking on the floor down to the shelter of this roof. What say ?”

Mamma Stanhope would have gone to the moon if Beaudesfords had led the way. Catherine's objections were hushed; and before the eastern stars had melted into the flames of sunrise the boat had stretched its wings, and, laden with such a crew as it never bore before, went flying zigzag up the river that crept from gray to gold with morning breaking on the banks, reaching its destination by noon, when, by Beaudesfords' ukase, the party scattered for a nap before they should be summoned to a dinner for which a telegram posted from the village had already prepared his housekeeper.

Mamma Stanhope sunk among her pillows, deep and downy as clouds, enjoying into the core of her heart the sumptuousness about her, already mistress of it in prospective, and sleeping the sleep of the just. Caroline, of altogether too common clay to keep awake when a luxurious cushion offered its repose, followed her example; while Rose, like a tired child, had been dozing in the boat itself. Only Catherine, with a grieved and outraged sense of the indelicacy of bringing her here to spread her price before her, — the last thing, assuredly, that Beaudesfords would have thought of, — was stung wide awake; and, feeling

the house to be as insupportable as a prison, she threw her scarf over her head, and, wandering down the garden, had strolled beyond, pausing where a growth of lofty oaks spread a perpetual canopy of glancing gold and emerald, while the trunks made mighty colonnades down the long and open woodland.

She paused, because Gaston stood there: unwilling to join him, and thinking he had not seen her, she was about to retrace her way, when all at once a distant voice, calling and commanding, arrested her; and then a great, open-mouthed bay, a war-cry, resounded in rough music, and an enormous mastiff, but one remove from the gray wolf of northern forests, flashed past her, and flew at Gaston's throat. She stood rooted for that moment, while the man, bent backward in the dreadful contest, seized the jaws of the monster, wrenched them open from the heavy frieze they had caught, and, with a blow of his fist that resounded like a sledge-hammer, had felled the brute to the ground.

He came up to Catherine, almost directly afterward, as if nothing had happened. "Which?" said Mrs. Stanhope, when she one day told her about it, — "which brute?"

“Which brute?” said Catherine, coolly.
“Why, Gaston, of course.”

“Were you much frightened?” Gaston asked.
“The fellow has a grudge against me. I had no idea the wolf had such a memory though. Beaudesfords should not have let him loose with you upon the grounds. He is one of the pets of the place.”

“You must come in and have your wound dressed,” she said quickly. “Some day you will be going mad!”

“Thank you, there is no wound to dress. He has only torn my jacket and grazed the skin.”

Beaudesfords came running up, white and breathless. “My God, Gaston!” he cried: “I thought you were done for! I saw the struggle.”

“Oh, it was magnificent!” said Catherine.

“Heyday! you should have been a Roman girl to applaud at the great circuses, where you could have seen men eaten up alive any day. Hurry up to the house, Gaston. Mrs. Gray will make all right. Is the flesh torn?”

“The merest trifle. I hope I have not injured the beast,” looking back where the mastiff had struggled up on his fore-feet. “But so warm a welcome” —

“I will settle his case. There is only one penalty. If you will go up with Catherine.”

“Does Mr. Beaudesfords value such a creature?” asked Catherine, as they moved away.

“Yes: I am sorry to say as much as any thing at Beaudesfords. He has belonged to him for years, and at one time, when lost in the snow between these hills, rescued him from death. He has some human traits, however,—jealous of his master’s friends and hating me.”

“Is it so much a human trait to hate you?”

“I will not be so melodramatic as to say so,” said Gaston, in a bitter voice that answered for him.

They were walking rapidly, but stopped just then at what seemed to Catherine the most beautiful sight of all her life: it was a flight of birds that darkened the air, that made a thousand lightnings in the sunshine, wings and wings thicker than autumn leaves, scattering, uniting, rising into heaven, rushing over them and winnowing the air like grain till they became lost and swallowed in the blue.

“Ah, how lovely!” cried Catherine.

“They fly as if Epaminondas manœuvred them,” said Gaston. “Strange that the resist-

ance of the air should shape their flight into the very wedge to cleave it. Yes: every thing is lovely at Beaudesfords. Every sound makes music — listen ! ”

It was only the echo of a pistol-shot, repeated and repeated till it died in a silvery sough.

They turned, ere the echo expired: there was a little puff of smoke dissipating under the oaks, the mastiff had bounded and fallen over dead, and Beaudesfords was hastening away. Catherine shivered as she went in, finding herself standing as it were between two such volcanic foci; and nothing being said about the mastiff and his end, when Beaudesfords, gay and smiling, reappeared to take Mamma Stanhope in to dinner, she also, for many a day thereafter, said nothing.

What a dinner it was ! These young women, bred upon simple fare and in simple ways, could hardly taste the wonderful viands in view of the wonderful service, china, brilliant and brittle as bubbles, the epergne a piece of jewelry, glasses like rock-crystal, the frosted silver and beaten gold; and to think that it was all within Catherine's reach ! Even Rose went over to the enemy. Perhaps the exquisite Moselle, in whose

sparkle you tasted the Muscat grape itself, warmed Mrs. Stanhope's blood more generously than was its wont; for she fairly bubbled with pleasure when her glance followed Catherine by and by as she moved down the hall among the pictures and bronzes and enamelled armors, remembering how Catherine loved splendor and queendom, the rustle of silk, the whiteness of ermine. Beaudesfords' eyes followed her with a different thought. How sweet her presence and her grace seemed in these great rooms where so seldom of late years had there been any thing to be seen better than wreaths of tobacco smoke! how sweet her voice in the halls that, in the intervals of long silence and disuse, had so seldom rung with any thing but the hilarity of late carousals! Gaston, meanwhile, busied himself in cutting little devils and dragons out of butter-nuts: he had no eyes for any thing but his handiwork.

So at last the St. Veronica had been seen and pronounced to be Catherine herself, so much so that it vexed our young lady a little to leave it in Beaudesfords' possession; then the grounds had been travelled over and the improvements lauded by Mrs. Stanhope; the housekeeper had

repaired the rents in Gaston's jacket; and in the evening twilight they dropped down the river.

The gentle current bore them along slowly at first, underneath a shaking sail,—it was the movement of a dream: then the tide ran down more strongly, the breeze came in pursuit, and they heard the river hissing behind them as it closed over the gash their keel made. The stars came out, and sparkled as though the wind fanned their fires. Beaudesfords, alive with gayety, seemed to sparkle back at them. Gaston, also unbending, became genial again after his fashion: soon he began to sing,—sweet and sonorous tones. Presently Catherine was singing too: his breath came fast as he heard her, the voice was so delicious,—his own trembled, he grasped the tiller more closely, as if he could control himself by controlling another thing, and poured out a volume of melody on which hers seemed to rise and float like some white-winged sea-bird on a sustaining flood. Beaudesfords leaned back, his face in the starlight shining with enjoyment. A school of shad followed in their wake, leaping and flashing out of the dark stream. “See,” said Beaudesfords, in the succeeding silence, “all the lurleys and creatures of the deep have risen

at your song, are following after us, presently will be aboard and sink us! It makes me shiver! Oh for a lanthorn and a spear, and such a breakfast of planked mermaid as you should have tomorrow, Mamma Stanhope!"

"No more shad for us," replied Mamma, "unless you want to make us phosphorescent."

"We are sparkling enough now, you think?"

"There is a bittern booming," said Gaston. "We are almost home."

"What a run it has been!" said Catherine. "How sorry I am! What is there more intoxicating than this swift motion by starlight?"

"One thing only," said Gaston, between his teeth and unheard.

"There is the cottage," said Mamma. "See the dew on the hedges. Come, you sleepy children!" for Rose and Caroline had, this last hour, been little more than ballast.

"How the wind freshens down there among the breakers!" said Gaston, pointing at the white line that fringed the river's mouth.

"It is like a dance of death by beautiful ghosts," answered Catherine.

"Will you go on, Beaudesfords?"

"Not I. Enough of this for one day. I have

always had my doubts if heaven wouldn't pall on me."

"I never shared them," replied Gaston.

The boat touched the landing under the lee of the steep hill which you climbed to the Stanhope cottage. Beaudesfords sprung ashore, helped out Mrs. Stanhope, and passed Rose and Caroline along.

"But you," said Gaston to Catherine, "would like to tempt that distance?"

The rudder turned, the sail flapped and filled, the painter slipped from Beaudesfords' grasp and plashed in the water; and before Mrs. Stanhope's warning voice could be lifted, Gaston and Catherine were flying out to sea.

Catherine stood forward by the mast, Gaston sat in the stern; but what a strange freedom rioted through their hearts alike as they went coursing over the channel, rising on the broad tide-waves, plunging up and down in the chop upon the bar, then soaring and sinking with a large wild motion on the great sea-swells, while silver thunders filled their ears, and tall foam-phantoms rose and fell in misty whiteness everywhere about them. Catherine was where she had never been,—in a narrow strait that wound

safely between two cruel sandbars and horns of rock, so that she found herself with tumultuous waters before her and behind her, on this side and on that, surrounded by stormy sea and starlit darkness in the midst of the breakers.

Since Gaston knew his way in, he surely knew it out, — it never occurred to her to doubt him, — all was well if the wind held, if the mast held. The moment was too splendid for fear; and fear or not, they could not have heard each other speak. On one side now the waves shot up across the gloom in spires of silver; on the other boiled the whirlpool, a black pit of fire and spume; just beyond was the still and open water. Suddenly a snap that Catherine never heard: the tiller had broken, and sent Gaston reeling from his seat, with the fragment in his hand; the boat staggered as if it had been struck by death, then drifted broad on the breaker that in another moment would have swamped her. But before that moment came, Gaston had thrown himself upon the floor, had thrust his long arm through the tiller-hole to the shoulder, and with a hand of iron had seized and held the rudder as the tiller did. The boat hung and trembled like a creature about to take some dreaded leap; in

spite of his gigantic strength the cords knotted and rose on his arm, and sent a pain grinding through his body that he had reason to remember for months ; then the chasing wave came on, bent to its fall, broke in a line of whiteness, rolled up and caught them on its back and tossed the boat over into safe water. Gaston twisted his arm free, trimmed his sail, and, steering with an oar, took the outer way through open sea, and so up the winding channel and home again.

When it was all over, Catherine realized the peril they had passed through ; but Gaston stood with the oar in his left hand half behind him, and looking forward so unconcernedly that she scorned to do less. So she wrung the spray out of her hair in silence, — perhaps there would have been a trifle too much flutter in the voice above all that palpitation.

The boat went about, and they made the shore. Gaston dropped the sail, threw over the anchor, and handed her out, saying some trivial thing. Then he went up the steep, dark-thicketed bank beside her, where wafts of sweetness floated down from the garden, and left her within the little gate. She held her hand across : he took it for a moment, still standing on the other side, tower-

ing above her where she glowed like some tropical blossom just opened on the night; the shadows of the tree-branches waved round them, only the glint of a star broke through, the murmuring river shone in a mystical glimmer below; all the world slept, the distant shrilling of the cricket seemed but the silence singing to itself. It was a spell of hush and midnight and dew, not broken even when two faces bent together and the lips in one long thrill and touch of passion drew the soul from each other.

Sleep was slow in descending on Catherine's eyes that night: he never made his pillow on such flushed and burning roses as her cheeks. The hours passed in a wild and happy forgetfulness, the deep dream of love and innocence that the heart dreams with waking eyes. The face of Gaston was the thing she saw, as it bent slowly toward her; his figure, as he stalked away into the darkness. Let her have her night's pleasure in remembering it, in her heart's beating up one great throb of bliss, in feeling still that kiss upon her lips: the next time that she saw Gaston she had been for more than two years the wife of Beaudesfords.

IV.

GASTON did not come on the next morning, nor in the afternoon. Instead of him, at night, Beaudesfords came. Catherine heard his voice trolling some catch as he approached: the color sprang again to her cheeks, with the thought that his silent companion was beside him.

"It is insupportable!" said he. "I never can stay down there alone; and I cannot go away, you know! I shall come up here, Mamma Stanhope, bag and baggage. Gaston has gone, — gone when I had him safe for a month! He would not delay another day; said he had stayed too long already; and, having letters to write, he could not make his farewell call, but charged me to present apologies, and say every thing that was necessary. So please consider it said."

"Major Gaston gone!" exclaimed Rose.

"Isn't that a sudden thing?" asked Mamma Stanhope.

“And like all sudden things. I detest surprises: there never was a pleasant one. He goes to Europe first, and then post-haste to the isthmus. Oh! that’s an immense nature of his, Mamma Stanhope!” said Beaudesfords, enthusiastically. “Spurning indulgences, comforts, friends; not wishing for money, not caring for fame; not even hoping to associate his name with his achievements,—just rapt in his work for his work’s sake.”

“I daresay,” said Mrs. Stanhope.

“How you do idealize people!” said Caroline. “For my part, I pronounce him a spleeny man, who wants the doctor!”

“Too long already,” repeated Catherine. But she did not say it aloud. She stepped through the window and down the garden, and stood in the shadow where she had stood last night,—too much bewildered to think or feel till the pain rose and stung away the numbness; then heart and brain had it out between them on that battle-field. Around her were the same low-hanging branches, the same flower-shaken odors, the same dusky alleys; below her the dewy bank, the dark-gleaming river, the wide, low landscape stretching on in reach after reach of deeper shade; but from it

all the meaning had been robbed. She went back to the house at length, pale and tired; hope and joy had fallen slowly from her like a borrowed investiture; she was a desolate woman.

The summer passed. Beaudesfords had long since followed Gaston's example, but Mrs. Stanhope's table was heavy with the fruit and flowers that every day arrived from him. If the truth were told, there was not a great deal else on the table; for Mrs. Stanhope's property had suffered a serious diminution by the opening to the public of a bridge, which caused a toll-gate and turnpike that had always rendered her good revenue to become almost worthless. She was not the sweetest counsellor and adviser to Catherine under such circumstances, and only a dozen times a day held up to her, in a mute and well-bred way, the trouble, if not suffering, that her ridiculous tempers had inflicted on her family. For Caroline had become now a confirmed invalid, scarcely leaving her sofa, and requiring doctors and dainties and appliances far beyond her mother's means of supply. Catherine walked through the alleys of the chill November garden, with the falling leaves rustling round her feet, and the wind sighing in the branches. She sighed as well: no

longer with sorrow of sore heart or rankle of wounded pride, but with a heavy indifference, since she found nothing in life worth the living. Gaston's expedition had departed at last, and Beaudesfords had dropped in upon them again on his way home. He was talking to her mother when she came in from the river-bank, with her hands full of scarlet alder-berries and the satin milk-weed, whose bursting down all starred with the brown seeds, looked like a branchful of sparrows, as he said, rising to take them from her. A flare of the fitful firelight showed him her face, grown white and thin. It pleased him, for an instant, with the selfish fancy that she had missed him; and then it came over him that soon they might all be missing her. The sound of the autumn wind round the gables made his flesh creep: he piled up the blazing brush in the chimney himself, and wheeled a screen between her chair and the window; but he saw, while he did so, a dislike to have attention drawn to her in that way. He began then some recital or other to Mamma Stanhope, moving about the room in his usual nervous manner when telling any incident whose occurrence had excited him at all; knocked the screen aside as he finished, told Rose

she looked like a little actress whose photograph half the world was going crazy over, romped with the Blenheim and the macaw, then paused on the rug in front of Catherine to take breath, and to compliment her casually on the improvement in her appearance, till the color rose upon her cheek indeed.

As he stood there, all at once a curious sound above them of crumbling plaster and falling sand, a puff of dust, and the great mirror over the mantel had loosened, and was plunging down. Catherine darted with upstretched arms, and snatched a corner of the frame with all the force she had. Beaudesfords had turned in a breath and caught it with stronger hands: a second later, and it would have splintered in his flesh and crushed him to the floor. They managed to hold it up between them till assistance came; then Catherine ran to her room for repairs, and Beaudesfords to his inn for a change of linen.

He came back undaunted though, directly, for it was not much more than a dozen rods away; and, entering again, sat down on the cushion at Catherine's feet, taking her white worsted skeins on his own hands. They were alone; for Mrs.

Stanhope was attending to her tea-table, and Rose had gone upstairs to see if Caroline would come down.

Beaundesfords held his skein to the end without a word. As he surrendered the thread, he looking up, she down, their glances met, and he laughed. There are some people who always laugh with any happy agitation. "I am going to ask you a question," said he then, with just a trace of hesitation in the voice, in spite of his audacious eye. "Were you ever sorry for your evil behavior on one morning of last summer?"

She wondered what he meant for just a second, when, being no coquette, with a full heart she answered, "Never."

"Then, may I ask, why under the sun, or the ceiling, you sprung to my rescue in that way, at the risk of broken arms, just now?"

She surveyed him with surprise. "I would have done it," she cried, "for any clod that had stood there."

"So! But, Catherine, tell me one thing. Am I positively distasteful to you?"

"No, no, no," she answered him impatiently. "I like you well enough."

"And you can look on my perpetual com-

panionship with nothing like pleasure?" he asked.

"With nothing like pleasure," she replied.

He was standing now, but still looking at her downcast face and heightened tint,—the perfect picture,—eyes that were not to sparkle for him, smiles that were not to brighten, lips that should never be his. Before he knew what he was doing, he had stooped and kissed them; had fulfilled his old, daring dream, and made the mouth his own,—the fragrant and delicious mouth; lips that another kiss, unknown to any, had left sacred, whose touch was sacrilege.

"I will never forgive you!" she cried.

"I will never ask you!" he replied, striding off; but in a trice he was back again.

"At your feet," he said, throwing himself on the low seat once more. "You would not despise so much a lover less humble. Gaston, perhaps. A man that takes your heart, and never sues for it!" He did not see her wince, nor hang her head with a kind of shame, as he went on. "But it was unpardonable. You cannot overlook it. I should love you less, Catherine, if you failed to resent such a liberty."

All in a moment her head had fallen on her knees, and she was sobbing as if she would break her heart. Once before, indeed, she had failed to resent such a liberty !

Beaundesfords started to his feet, pacing quickly up and down the room, returned, and took both her hands in his.

“ Catherine,” he said, “ I will not worry you again with any wishes of mine. I had thought that, possibly, if you went away with me, among strangers, learning to lean upon me, to need me, you might also learn to love me.” After all, the intonation came like a question.

She did not look up, nor say a word. What she thought, who knows ? Comfort for Caroline, peace with her mother, a future for Rose,— the wealth and splendor that she loved, sumptuous ease, the certainty of honoring, the possibility of more,— since life was so arid, since he was so kind. Still she never stirred.

Her silence made a hope spring up in his heart, sweeter than any words, a charm, luring him on to his ruin, he once said to himself when remembering it. Still silent, his arm was about her. He had gathered her unresisting, unresenting, to himself.

"But you know I do not love you," she whispered, lifting her face at last with the tears yet undried.

"I know, too, that if I do not make you, I shall not deserve to have you," he said. "My life is yours. You must! You shall!"

When the bell rung, and Mrs. Stanhope's voice itself was heard in further summons, they crossed together into the little tea-room. Beaudesfords went behind Mrs. Stanhope, and, bending back her head, gave her forehead a filial salute. "Mamma Stanhope," he said, "there is going to be a wedding here next month. You are all going to live with me at Beaudesfords."

It was even as he said. There was a wedding there. Catherine had no reason for delay, and they all went to live at Beaudesfords. But when his wife grew more white and thin with every day, more listless and languid, failing to find pleasure in her splendor, in the envy of her friends, to like the lustre of her silks or the glory of her gems, Beaudesfords took her away alone with him into strange scenes and foreign countries. Tender care, serene skies, enjoyment of all the novel pleasure that the Old World has to give, beguiled her from herself at

length. She came home, when two years were over, a woman full of health, with a gracious yet commanding presence, more beautiful than the vision of a dream, satisfied enough with life; and when she crossed the threshold, the first person that she saw was Gaston.

V.

“BEAUDESFORDS!”

“Gaston!”

“The last man I dreamed of seeing here!”

“The first that I desire to see! You remember my wife, Gaston?”

How long ago it seemed to him since Gaston had seen her! He himself had been so nearly happy that these two years were like a blessed age, beyond which he could scarcely recollect. He had known well in the beginning that Catherine did not love him; but when month by month of their foreign sojourn went by, and under the sunbeams of his constant care her heart seemed to open like a flower, with little acts of graciousness, an intimate word, a clinging to his arm, a seat reserved beside herself; when, into all the familiar intercourse of daily life, sometimes there slipped from her lips a half-endearing term, sometimes a smile, — once, he remembered, a caress, a slight

and brief and trivial thing, yet a caress, — then Beaudesfords' heart had lightened of all the load it ever bore, and he believed that ere long he should win her for his own indeed, that her heart would be his, as his had so long been hers ; and possessed of what he fancied to be an infinite patience, he waited, and day and night his one thought was her pleasure. But, in fact, Beaudesfords had no patience at all : he had in its place a plentiful perseverance. He had never been called upon to suffer seriously : had he been, he would have rebelled and fallen at once. He could not suffer in his siege of Catherine's heart : it must end but one way, he thought, and it was all a precious endeavor. To serve those we love is a delight. Beaudesfords then, during these two years, had been happy in earning the wages of bliss. The time seemed to him a period that had no date behind it. He forgot that Catherine had ever stood upon the verge of want, forgot that he had ever conferred a benefit upon her. This wealth and ease seemed to provide her natural atmosphere ; and thus he almost forgot that Gaston and she had ever exchanged a glance.

“ You remember my wife, Gaston,” said he.
“ You remember her when you first saw her,

standing on that ledge of rocks ;” for the picture she had made in standing there flashed back upon him at the moment. “ Ah, that was a thousand years ago ! She was an airy nothing then,” he said : “ now she has a local habitation and a name. She is Beaudesfords of Beaudesfords now ! ”

To all this Gaston replied not a syllable. He only bowed lower and lower over a cold hand that lay in his one instant, and seemed to melt away like a snow-flake ; and scarcely could it be said that his brown face darkened with a deeper hue than the mere bending gave it.

But across Catherine’s memory flashed another picture, — the starlit midnight, with the swinging shadows of its tree-branches, his lips that bent to hers, her lips that rose to his ; and a bitter flush of shame burst over throat and face, and dyed them with a stain that Beaudesfords had never seen before. Then she had passed on to receive the welcome of the hurrying and clustering servants, and to her mother’s rooms, where Mrs. Stanhope and her other daughters sat without suspicion of the scene below.

Gaston had arrived at Beaudesfords only that day, intending to take away with him various articles of his property that, during his expedi-

tion, had remained under the protection of its roof. Mrs. Stanhope, who kept the house in her daughter's absence, or rather kept the house-keeper, and who held one of the diplomatic principles of always treating a man as if you might some day want to use him, now that there was no danger, with Catherine safely provided for, and out of the way besides, and with Rose too much of Caroline's mind to be affected one way or the other in a single day and night, felt the coming of this adventurous gentleman to be a great lightener of the tedium she experienced in their splendid but lonesome country-seat, could not forbear reading to him, in her magnanimity, the latest letters from her son and daughter, and urged him to pass the night beneath the roof that had, in truth, been wont to be as often his shelter as that of Beaudesfords himself. She was as much surprised as everybody else when Catherine stood smiling in the doorway, like the embodiment not only of a great sunbeam, but of a whole sky full of sunshine; for Beaudesfords was a spendthrift in surprises, much as he had once declared that he detested them, and always contrived to swoop down on his household when they thought him a hundred horizons away.

Beauesfords, of course, would not hear of Gaston's leaving ; on the contrary, he must stay, — stay indefinitely. Just back from his expedition, what engagements had he ? None at all. This was his home : he had no other. Did he understand that ? Did he suppose that because he, Beauesfords, was married, his wife banished his friends ? No : Catherine and he had but one wish. The western wing, as of old, as much as he wanted of it, should be in his undisturbed possession so long as he chose to occupy it or to return to it : if ever he made another home for himself, with a hearth-stone in it, and anybody sitting beside the hearth-stone, well and good ; but till he made it, — and Beauesfords didn't believe he was a marrying man, — till he made it, the fiat had gone forth : bring his traps down to Beauesfords.

And so he did.

VI.

THERE was a world of work out of doors for the master of Beaudesfords. A thousand things were in arrears. Though Mrs. Stanhope had done the best a woman could, her dominion ended, to all essential purpose, with McRoy in the flower-garden : her arms were not long enough to reach the limits of the great estate, nor strong enough to hold it in subjection. Beaudesfords and Gaston spent day after day in dismissing and engaging, superintending, ordering, and seeing the orders executed. Catherine, wearied with travel apparently, kept her room in great measure. Mrs. Stanhope's managing ways held all in order about her ; while her lively, handsome face, and Rose's bewitching little liberties, and Caroline's languor and exactions, made the drawing-room scenes any thing but tiresome. Still, there was a great vacuum where Catherine should have been. Beaudesfords too, when under the roof,

divided his time between her place of abode and that of the others—the others who had countless things to say and hear—in an unsatisfactory manner. And so, when at last it had been decided that Gaston was to remain, and after one or two weeks had given her rest, and afforded no earthly reason for her longer absence, one day again Catherine took up her sceptre, and began to reign through her prime-ministers.

There was a low fire on the wide hearth, that filled a small portion of the spacious drawing-room with a rich and ruddy half-light: the rest of it was remote in twilight and shadows. But, just as the door swung open, a long frolicking flame darted into life and shot up the chimney in a flash that sent its ray straight to the spot where Catherine stood, surveying the group by the fire-side, a revelation of light herself. The two men looked up together; and if she were not photographed upon their memories for ever, as she delayed that instant, it is because no photography has any means of perpetuating such color and such brilliance. She was in dinner-dress, wearing a heavy gold-colored fabric full of lustre and sweeping from her in broad folds, and a knot of vivid scarlet geraniums was at her breast. With

her pale, gold-colored hair, with the sudden bloom upon her cheeks, with her wide and shining eyes, she seemed the very answering spirit of the flame that had just shot up to the outside freedom of stars and night. There was that about Catherine always reminding Beaudesfords of light. Gaston and Beaudesfords both sprang to meet her; but Gaston paused after the first motion, and it was the other who led her to her seat and brought the cushion for her feet. If Beaudesfords had shown one atom less devotion, had demanded something, refused something, not so lavishly have given all, — for a woman loves a master, not a slave!

“Well, Mistress Beaudesfords,” exclaimed Rose, “welcome home! If you’re a good girl, you may stay: you may sit at the head of your own table!”

“Many thanks,” replied Catherine, slowly. “I shall not deprive Mamma of her seat.”

“Mamma likes it, though,” said Rose. “It is a remnant of authority. If we are naughty, she cuts off our soup.”

“I’m sure, Catherine,” cried Mrs. Stanhope, “I shall never think of taking your place in your house.”

“As you please, Mamma,” she answered, with

the air of one speaking on a disagreeable topic. "It is so troublesome for you."

"Yes, yes, Mamma Stanhope," exclaimed Beaudesfords, who would perhaps have liked to see his wife the mistress of his house, but who would not have her troubled even to humor his fondest wish. "She is too worn and tired yet,—by and by, perhaps!" And he turned to Catherine his smiling, asking face.

It was a little thing, that matter of Catherine's seat at table, giving the housekeeper her orders, and overlooking her accounts; but it involved a greater one. To have assumed her place at once, that would have been a sheltering rampart; to have directed the affairs of her household, it would have impressed upon her the fact that it was her household, the fact of how it became hers; to have been the mistress in Beaudesfords would have given emphasis to its master. But she shrank from all that, as if she had no right either to the burden or the honor. "By and by, perhaps!" repeated Beaudesfords. "By and by," she answered wearily, and dropped her fan into her lap. But Beaudesfords was content: with him, so much was always the promise of more. It was enough just to see her there. The stream

of small talk rippled from the others, the fire sparkled, he hovered here and there, restless as some winged thing, now bending over Catherine, now sparring for a turn with Gaston, now wondering if dinner would never be served. Rose joined in the sparring; Caroline, even, had her sofa wheeled up that she might lose none of the hour's enjoyment. As for Catherine, she said nothing; she seldom said any more; she was one of those persons whose reticence is eloquence, having, besides, a language of lip and cheek and eye, of hand and breath; she listened to the utterance of a philosopher or of a fool, and understood both, be it said; in truth, it was her comprehensiveness that, when one was habituated to her beauty, impressed the most; too thoroughly womanly to originate, she received every thing; and whether it were through some clear understanding, or some fine instinct, or on a common ground of perfectly developed humanity, the speaker always felt that not a syllable was lost upon his listener. When she did open her lips, her words carried weight. Thus with Beaudesfords, well wont to her ways, other women's speech indeed might be silver, but Catherine's silence was golden.

Gaston sat with the bright tongs in his hand,

stooping forward, and building up an edifice of the falling coals, watching the life run through them and die ; and then dinner was softly announced, and Beaudesfords called Gaston to Catherine, and himself led Mamma Stanhope to the contested seat. But that touch of Catherine's hand upon his arm was so light that Gaston could not feel it: the next moment it was withdrawn, and she had taken her chair. By some ill-will of circumstance, Mamma Stanhope failed to call Gaston to her own right hand: he sat at Catherine's, and the order of things was established.

"I don't know why it is," said Beaudesfords, when they were again in the drawing-room, and sipping their coffee, "but, faultless as I used to think things were in this lodge, they never seem one half so home-like as in your charming cottage, Mamma Stanhope."

"That is because there are none of our little rooms, where, in turning round, you tipped over the centre-table, and put an elbow through the mirror," said Rose. "How can you be at home in these great parlors, with their alcoves and suites that may hold a thousand ambuscades?"

"Why fear ambuscades with a soldier beside you?"

“And then the music,” complained Caroline.
“It spreads into thin air.”

“So?” said Beaudesfords. “Let us see. Catherine, if you would sing” —

To his surprise she rose at once. Gaston had just given his cup to the servant, and was standing before her, leaning one arm on the mantel: perhaps she did not care to dwell on the sight. Ere he could offer to conduct her, a scale ran up the keys of the piano: she had seated herself and commenced playing.

“Frost-bitten,” said Beaudesfords. “The tones tinkle like icicles, as they fall from your fingers.” He lay in the great cushions of a lounge, their soft carnation lending his face a flush, and deepening the tint of his yellow curls. Catherine looked at him a moment, and thought of some of the richly colored canvases she had stood before in Europe. His head was something superb: it had the look of some Capitolean god’s; such youth and beauty had a kind of majesty next to immortal majesty. Then, the piano facing down the room, she raised her glance, and Gaston still stood against the mantel, surveying her with his darkening eyes, — the plain face with its scar, its ruggedness, its gloom. And the other went out of her mind like a star in the night.

"The voice ! The voice !" cried Beaudesfords.

"I have none to-night," said Catherine, after a little while, as if she had just understood what he had said.

"Not for this ?" was spoken beside her, and Gaston's arm, reaching forward, set a sheet of music on the rack. "You sang it on the night that we dropped down the river from Beaudesfords. Do you remember ?"

"I remember," said Catherine. It was the first sentence, save in brief greetings, they had exchanged since that night. And for the second time the color overspread her face, beheld by Beaudesfords. He rose on one arm, and watched her as she sang, as her voice soared, — of a sudden inspired by bitter strength, and penetrating every heart with the wild sweetness of its inmost tones.

Sorrow be all my sport !
Since here no breast
Lends me its own support
And heaven's rest.

Sorrow be all my stay !
For now no arm
Upholds me as I sway
From storm to calm.

Sorrow be all my grace !

No smile there is

To overrun my face

When flung from his.

O Sorrow ! lift thy sword

Whose lightnings shine !

Destroy me at a word ;

For I am thine !

Beaundesfords rose from the lounge, and began to pace up and down the drawing-room. "Why do you sing such songs as those?" he said, as she still turned over the music, and when Gaston had strolled out to smoke his cigar on the veranda. "They are the merest nonsense. It must have been a love-lorn lassie who implored after that fashion. My wife,"—his voice always loved to linger over that word,— "sing to me

'His very step has music in't

As he comes up the stair.'"

And he woke her in the night to know if that silly song had any meaning for her, if she would never find her happiness in loving him truly, if she had indeed rather die than live his wife.

"You are very good to me, Beaundesfords," said Catherine, unconsciously adopting the words of the wife of Auld Robin Gray. "Do not fret

yourself imagining vain things. Are we not friends. Do I not bear your name? Be content, dear Beaudesfords." She laid her hand upon his eyes, and lest the soft and seldom touch should leave him he neither stirred nor spoke till sleep took up the tale in one long happy dream.

VII.

“CATHERINE,” cried Beaudesfords, one wet afternoon a day or two subsequently, coming in with his thumb and finger between the leaves of a worn clasp-book, “you must hear Gaston’s journal : I must read it to you ” —

“Willingly,” said Caroline, with her usual backwardness.

“No, though : on the whole,” added Beaudesfords, “I will have Gaston read it himself, while your needles fly — did I ever see you sew before, Catherine ?” And he looked at her a moment, smiling with a pleased sense of the domesticity of the scene ; for Catherine and her mother, in pursuance of a salutary plan of the former’s, a plan for clothing certain destitute people in the neighborhood, were engaged, each after her own fashion, — Mrs. Stanhope, that is, earnestly, as if it were a debt she owed her own good fortune, a pledge for her future ; Catherine dreamily, like one who understands the idleness of trying to

cozen fate,—on the wicker of sewing-work which had been brought down to the southerly parlor, a room much used at Beaudesfords in the autumn days, since all one side of it was a latticed window opening on the bright beeches and maples of the lawn, though to-day the glory of the trees was only to be seen there flying in gusts upon the gale that tossed them. “I have been poring over it,” continued Beaudesfords, — “over what I can make out of it; for he writes a cursed shorthand of his own invention. Here, Cyril,” as the lad answered the bell, “ask Major Gaston if he is too busy to join us in the morning-room.” And Beaudesfords planted the book on the mantelshelf, and stood leaning over the fire while he turned the leaves. “About as strange a record,” said he, “as if it had been kept in another planet. To-day the guest of an emperor” —

“Major Gaston!” cried Mrs. Stanhope, the idea of the thing causing the degree of the man’s consideration in the good lady’s mind to rise perceptibly.

“Bless your dear soul, of a greater yet! of Christopher Columbus himself!”

“What in the world are you talking about, Beaudesfords?” said Caroline.

“Wait a bit, — you shall see,” answered Beaudesfords, fluttering the pages. “Here it is. ‘My interview with the emperor to-day was all I could desire. He received me with only a single gentleman in waiting, and entered at once upon the business in hand, examining my maps and proposals with a swift scrutiny that showed an amazing acquaintance with the subject; and, observing my surprise, he remarked that he had had time to consider many things. I told him I was not Vespuccius or Columbus to eat my bitter bread at the gates of princes, but that, engaged to survey in the region for private interests of another nature, I saw opportunity for vaster things, and came to him as the only monarch whose sight reached beyond the boundary of his own kingdom. “What is good for the world,” said he, “is good for the empire,” while he admitted with me that the cutting of Darien and Suez would diminish the circumference of the globe by at least one half, or, in other words, so far as human progress is concerned with commerce, would double the life of man. “A proud ambition,” said he, “to fulfil the hope of Columbus, and make the east and west one,” and he promised the funds from his private purse to carry out my

plans in my own time, engaging only that when completed they should be put in the hands of his capitalists. "Certainly," said he, "whoever has the canal that unites the Atlantic and Pacific has the keys that were promised to Columbus in his dream, the keys of the gateways of the sea." A great man, — holding Europe in the hollow of one hand, and reaching out the other to grasp the vital spot of the American continent, — if in this mighty age, when all the floods are out and crowns and sceptres are floating down with the raff, personal government can succeed at all, it must succeed with him.' So much for so much," said Beaudesfords. "Here's the other, — listen. 'Gracias á Dios' is far behind us. There Columbus gave thanks to God. For my part, I give thanks to my own energy. And yet as I hear the anchor-chains rattle down where his own did once, and I look out on the low, palm-fringed shore with its purple mountain-line beyond, doubtless much the same now as then, I confess that the other had the better of me: he worshipped an unknown power whose mere contemplation engendered vast ideas and led him on towards the "secret things of the sea that are bound with such strong chains;" and as for me, — well, I am

forced to remember what the man wrote to the Queen, *el mundo es poco*. But here I am in his domain, he makes me welcome, to-morrow we go ashore, and I begin my work, a bequest he left me perhaps, — to make the Atlantic and Pacific strike a balance, to bring the antipodes underneath Greenwich meridian, to find by land the “secret of the strait” for which he sought by sea; a part of that most immense of all the testaments when under stress of shipwreck he willed away a hemisphere. Shall I link my name with great thoughts, great deeds, great men, or is it all another Spanish castle in the air?”

“Gaston with castles in the air!” exclaimed Caroline. “Well, tell us, Beaudesfords, did he do it?”

“Oh! he made his beginning. He made famous headway till those little tempests in a teapot, that they call civil wars down there, rendered it impossible to proceed. But he will be busy with his estimates and drawings here till the coast is clear to resume” —

“He’s a modest man, isn’t he?” said Caroline. “Offsetting Columbus with himself!”

“Well — Gaston hasn’t much reverence. He doesn’t believe in the supernatural, you know.

But he believes tremendously in humanity,—that's what this work means. And I suppose it is exactly because he so fully appreciates that single-minded old sailor that he aspires to put the best there is in himself beside him, you see."

"Doesn't believe in the supernatural?" exclaimed Caroline, whose mind having received one idea could not immediately accommodate itself to another. "But you do, Beaudesfords?"

"Oh, yes! I believe in every thing," said Beaudesfords, lightly, still turning the leaves. "Wraiths and swarths, and the whole train of hobgoblins. It requires more moral strength and vitality than I possess to be sufficient to yourself in the way Gaston is. I fancy I should fall flat in the dust sometimes if I did not now and then take the tonic of a religious idea. Here, listen to this, Catherine. 'Night before last on a shelf of rock, Heaven only knows how high in heaven, a precipice climbing behind me into a ghostly sky, a precipice dropping before me into the bottomless pit for aught I know, a blast roaring over me On Mighty Pens, a suffocating whirl of snow whose terrors embruted my guides beneath the level of the mules, and in which, without fire, without food, cold as a frozen corpse,

I fought for breath till day dawned and fervent heat made the way clear for us again. This noon resting in the bowels of the earth, in the huge fissure of an earthquake whose walls a century of summers have been hanging with mossy curtains of green lycopods, draperies of blossoms more brilliant than the birds that haunt them, waving heavily at the breath of a mysterious breeze blowing from nowhere to nowhere. One sunbeam enters the place; far up on the brink a bamboo feathers into a fountain of light in it; then it falls on a pool of still water that glitters as if it were a sheet of quicksilver; falls on the scarlet wings of a flamingo flying down, a living flame; falls on a white ibis standing sleepily in the ray on the pool's edge and shining like an apparition. In the rent above my head, the sky, a vast height up, burns with a violet tinge so deep and sparkling that I could swear the stars themselves were burning there in the midday. A fine cut,—Nature may have made it for my purpose. If we could but foresee the oscillations of the crust and turn them to our own uses, and with another throe open it from sea to sea! Science is a barbarian yet, in the age of flints; by and by will get beyond pottery and the boiling-point perhaps, and then possibly we

may look to have the vibrations of the sphere's surface reduced to a system, to find out a motive for the *capriccio*. The eternal years of God are hers, indeed, as well as Truth's, — she needs them all, she will do nothing in less. Government, too, is in the same condition, — no forecast, no preordination: when my ditch is dug, there is its barbican, — the long outlying fortress, the island that is to take tribute of the nations, commanding presently the argosies of the Orient as they flock by, gathering into free ports the wealth of the world, the richest thing itself on earth, — and not a hand reaches out to grasp it! But the Queen of the Antilles must belong to the power that holds the inter-oceanic strait; or else, as the centre of the great Republic of the Archipelago, another Venice, rising in the west as that did in the east, renewing, by one of history's reprisals, — the swinging of the pendulum, — those maritime glories which the older Venice lost when Vasco de Gama closed the Alexandrian highway by one which must be in time abandoned for this ecliptic of commerce, she herself will possess it! 'Hm, hm, hm," said Beaudesfords; "now he is off on his theories again: they won't interest you."

"But, my dear child," said Mrs. Stanhope,

much as if she had found a scorpion in the house, "this man is a filibustero!"

"Gaston? Oh, no! He doesn't care the toss of a copper for our politics, doesn't believe in Manifest Destiny, thinks we are as given over to stupidity as Spain is to sottishness. Gaston has the Napoleonic bee in his bonnet. But you can't think, Catherine, how this diary renews my youth!"

"I should think it might," she said.

"Yes, indeed! I see the same sights over again that I saw when your father took me there. Your father had some of these same fancies, you know" —

"The same with a difference," said Mrs. Stanhope, sententiously.

"I remember one place in particular," continued Beaudesfords. "The scent of that rose in your breast reminds me of it. I wonder if Gaston ever came across any thing of the sort, — the merest trifle, — entering one of those dark old cities after midnight, where the gates were just matted in a white convolvulus that flowers all night long, and where the streets were carpeted with scattered blossoms, pomegranate-buds, orange-flowers, oleanders, jasmines, tuberose,

frangipanis, that had been strewn there by a religious procession to some shrine, and whose fragrance rose alone in the moonlight still like incense. Let us see — Leon — Granada — a hurricane that lost its way and whipped the fish dead in the lakes, and flocks of wild cockatoos into the houses, and strange white unnamed beasts fawning out of the forest — ah, here it is, by all that 's good! The same! Now, do you know, Catherine, just having Gaston see that same sight a dozen years after me, gives me more idea of the antiquity of those Spanish places, their unchanging age, — doing the same thing generation after generation, — than remembrance of all their three hundred years can do!”

“It must be very interesting to you,” said Catherine.

“I was sure you would think so! There, you shall take the book,” tossing it into her lap, “and read it to yourself: you will enjoy it so much more that way. You can make out enough of it; and I want you to see him as I do, for one can never have such a chance again with a man who is as silent as a sphinx! I wonder where he is, by the way. Not in the house, did Cyril say?”

“There he is now, coming round the lawn with Rose,” said Caroline, rising on one arm to look out. “How I should like a run in such a rain as this! But I never shall have it — For mercy’s sake, what is Major Gaston carrying in his arms?”

“Ah? Oh! a child, — McRoy’s May, isn’t it? Now that’s as it should be! If Gaston had wife and child” —

“He wouldn’t be Gaston,” said Mrs. Stanhope, breaking her thread with a snap.

“No: I suppose not,” said Beaudesfords, half sadly. “They would make too much light for him.”

“He ought to marry though, for all that,” added Mamma Stanhope, not without an anxious glance at Rose in a juxtaposition that was not agreeable to her.

“Of course,” answered Beaudesfords, strolling to the window. “A man is only half a man till he completes himself by marriage. I told Gaston yesterday that McRoy was happier than he, — McRoy, with his clod of a wife and sprite of a child. She is a rare child, — don’t you think so?”

“I have thought that perhaps we might educate her, Beaudesfords,” said Catherine.

“Why, so have I,” said Beaudesfords, still

looking out the window, though the subjects of their remark had disappeared round the corner of the house.

“Here they come!” cried Caroline. “Wet through, of course. Do tell us where you picked up Miss McRoy?”

“Major Gaston found her running after a rainbow,” said Rose, glittering herself like her namesake in a shower, “and he had snatched her up under his cloak when I met them. I am not wet” —

“Don’t stand a moment, Rose,” said Mrs. Stanhope, with displeasure. “I am surprised” —

“Don’t you fret, Mamma Stanhope. Cyril took my overshoes at the door, and there’s my cloak, and I ’m quite as dry as Dryasdust. It is the most absurd child,” as Catherine laid aside her work and took the little May on her knee, while Gaston sat down by the fire and opened the map for which he had gone out, — “the most absurd child,” said Rose. “She was tired of her hiding-place before we were half-way home, and when Major Gaston said he certainly could not leave her on the road, ‘Well,’ says she, ‘I suppose we must struggle on.’ O you little old woman!” cried Rose: “will you come and be our little girl?”

"May can't spare herself yet," said the child, archly, brushing her pretty hair out of her eyes, — hair like the "thistle-down tinted with gold."

"Not even to stay with us and hear the bird in the piano sing all day long?"

But May's lip trembled lest the sport were serious. "I am my father's child," said she gravely then.

"That she is," said Beaudesfords, "the apple of McRoy's eye!"

"His May apple," said Catherine, smoothing the little locks.

"But I love you," added the child, as if to soften her dissent; and putting one arm round Catherine's neck, she kissed her cheek, — a cool, sweet, dewy kiss, but Catherine felt it like a drop of blistering wax.

Beaudesfords stooped and kissed the child's mouth after it, and then caught her on his arm and began flourishing round the room with her aloft, till, with shrieks of laughter and fear, her little dimpled cheeks were red as peaches, and her Scotch blue eyes were bright as stars.

"Beaudesfords," said Mamma Stanhope under her breath, as Catherine gathered up her work, and rose and went upstairs, "you will make

the child forget that she is only the gardener's daughter."

"And so she is!" exclaimed Beaudesfords, as he held the door open for Catherine to pass through. "The same in person, or will be if she lives: violet eyes, and Hebe bloom, and all the rest that Eustace and the poet went to see,— 'a sight to make an old man young!' Why shouldn't I play with the gardener's daughter? Mamma Stanhope, you forget about the grand old gardener and his wife! Oh, God bless the children!" cried Beaudesfords. "How they brighten the world for us!"

"That is true," said Mrs. Stanhope. "Mine have done so for me. My husband used to say they held us in communication with the people that are dead and those that are not born."

"Make us ourselves a part of the great perfect race to come," said Beaudesfords, setting down the child for Rose to give her to Cyril to take home.

"Well, Beaudesfords," remarked Caroline, with her faculty of always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time,— perhaps, on the assumption of two negatives making an affirmative, thinking two wrongs might make a right,— "if you have

no children to make you laugh, you've none to make you cry."

"I wish to heaven I had!" cried Beaudesfords, hotly and forgetfully.

"To make you cry!"

"Ah, sister mine," for Beaudesfords' sunshine gilded even Caroline, "love is our salvation, you know; and the love of children is a perpetual breaking of sacramental bread!"

"There is the dressing-bell," said Mrs. Stanhope, who considered such conversation very unprofitable. "You will be late for dinner, Caroline."

"By the way," said Gaston, looking up from where he sat toasting his feet at the blaze, "I passed Ruthven on the road. He is coming up here presently."

"He will stay to dinner, then," said Beaudesfords. "So have your symptoms ready, Miss Stanhope. I can't say I'm glad you're not well, my dear; but we shouldn't have half so much of Ruthven if you were!"

"Thank you for nothing," said Caroline, as her maid came for her cushions, and the ladies left the room.

"Ruthven loves his rubber," said Gaston; "and

a partner like your good mother-in-law is after his own heart. What is this, Beaudesfords?" folding his map, and then bending to pick up the old morocco case of his journal from the hearth:

"So you have found me out?" answered Beaudesfords, mischievously. "I gave the book to Catherine. She and I are one, you remember. You haven't a word to say!"

Was it the blaze that burned so on Gaston's dark cheek as the room darkened? or was it the reflection that from that day Catherine must be coupling the thought of him with lofty ideas, heroic enterprises; with tropical magnificence, with the music of the great South Sea singing over the siren-caves that he had told of there, with the antique Aztec cities he had explored, with the traces of those mighty men who swam on bladders down the falls and foam of mountain rivers to the sack of Spanish cities; the colors of Caribbean waters, the landscapes lighted by volcanic fires, — must couple him with all the dark, rich mystery of such adventurous travel, till something of the atmosphere of its scenes and sights were made over to him, and he towered transfigured in half their grandiose splendor?

No: Gaston thought of nothing of the kind.

He only thought that at that moment Catherine was spelling out the record he had written,— Catherine, to whose eyes words to which Beaudesfords was blind would stand in letters of light.

And as for Catherine, when locked in her room she hung above the book, it seemed to her that the dark side of the moon had turned its hidden things toward her.

VIII.

THERE was only a day or two of this sort of life,— life that in its close domestic contact must not last; and then—nobody knew who first proposed it—the house filled with guests; and all the autumn days the gentlemen shot upon the meadows and between the hills, and the ladies beamed and brightened at nightfall when they returned. Gaston, for the present superintending the erection of some great water-works in the vicinity, came and went at his pleasure, now here, now there. If, when the shooting was over, Beaudesfords had ever enhanced his own value, ever made a gap in the circle, by any such brief absence!

If the house was full of guests, it appeared to be full of happiness too. Mrs. Stanhope was happy in receiving guests; Rose was happy as a firefly might be supposed to be; Caroline—since there was always some one to listen while she

expatiated on her complaints ; Beaudesfords was happy in giving happiness to all the rest ; and Gaston, even Gaston, looked as one looks who is happy, — yesterday he touched her hand, to-day he wrapped a shawl about her, to-morrow he would lift her into the saddle. And Catherine too, the general tide bathed her, the tide was rising round her that soon should touch her lips.

It was not, after all, an easy course that Catherine had to follow : indignation in remembering how lightly she had once been thrown over ; the ashes of an old fire rekindling day by day ; the quiet affection and respect for Beaudesfords pulling her heart toward him with pity, honor, and the duty that a woman owes her husband, — each a strong current of feeling ; and when all were to be blended into one stream of right action and pure emotion, it required a self-knowledge and self-control that do not often enter into the elements of any single character. Gaston, who sometimes read one's thoughts, you would almost say, watched her across all the phases of his own experience, — watched her too as a curious study, nearly sure she would succeed, and then half trembling with his certainty, if it could be said that Gaston ever trembled.

There had been a great snowfall at Christmas time. All the guests were imprisoned at Beaudesfords whether they would or no. When day dawned, the world was a white, pure thing, as fair and dazzling as it might be on the resurrection morning.

But on the previous night the storm had whirled round the great house and rumbled the length of the chimney-stacks, snapped off the boughs of the old Beaudesfords oaks, and roared abroad in a way to make a stout heart quake ; had there been any bells to ring in the Christmas eve at Beaudesfords, they would have been silenced in all the voices of the winds that swept at large in fury. But within doors it had been one glow of brightness and warmth ; fires had blazed, lights had beamed, mistletoe and holly lent their cheer, the windows shed out their lustre on the driving whiteness of the tempest till all the snow-flakes round them seemed but sparks of fire ; gay games had been given to the younger company ; music and dancing, and verses dramatized on the moment, beguiled the elder. Catherine, too, moved round among the guests in a warm, womanly way that was new to her : there was a bloom upon her cheeks, a softer light in her

eyes, — so gentle, so smiling, so dreamy, she was like those we read of in the mediæval lays, whose lives some sweet yet poisonous enchantment holds in thrall.

“Where is Gaston?” suddenly asked Beaufords of Rose, as he met her in a doorway with her arms full of fantastic finery for the charaders.

“Oh! we shan’t see Gaston till to-morrow night,” she lightly answered. “He told me yesterday he feared he should be detained at the water-works, and would not return till Christmas night.”

“Christmas eve, you mean. You misunderstood him, Rose of Cashmere: he told me Christmas eve. He should have been here two hours ago. I wonder if he has been so foolish as to undertake coming on foot from the station.”

“He is a perfect tramp,” said Rose.

“Perhaps — Have you heard the engine whistle?”

“No whistle but the winds to-night,” gathering up the trailing ends of a bit of silver damask.

“It can’t be that he has — He always chooses the short cut, and that leads over the little bridge that it takes all one’s head to cross in clear weather.”

“The old willow that lies from bank to bank you mean?” asked Rose, looking back. “He would never think of it! It makes me so giddy in summer, when the brook is half dry; and now it is a roaring little icy cataract, and the snow gathered on either side would mislead every step. No, indeed! Gaston won’t come till the great banquet on to-morrow night is spread: he likes to keep people waiting too. So summon all your fortitude, and live without him until then, if you can!” And she flitted away.

They had spoken at the entrance of the conservatory, as they passed each other there, Rose laden with a pile of brocades rummaged from forgotten wardrobes of the old Beaudesfords ladies. Catherine was just within, directing McRoy as he bound the wreaths and baskets for those who were to interpret that fragment of the old ballad —

“Weep no more, lady,
Your sorrow is in vain;
For violets pluckt the sweetest showers
Will ne’er make grow again!”

She turned her head unthinkingly, and only to hear their voices; then her hands grew cold as

she listened, so cold and numb that the flowers dropped from them unheeded, violets, purple, white, deepest black and goldenest yellow, in a rain of fragrance on the floor.

“He will get bewildered in all the dizzy tumult!” she heard Beaudesfords exclaim in a smothered voice. “He could not breathe an hour in it! I urging his return to-night! Quick there, Frye! Have out every man on the place — ropes and lanterns!” —

He was hurrying, swift-footed, ere he finished, to reach the hall, down whose length he hastened and threw open the great door. A wild white gust out of the fearful storm blew in, and tore onward, devouring the lights before it; but not till Beaudesfords had seen as wild and white a face across his shoulder, looking out with him into the raging night.

The music, the laughter, the voices of the clusters within the parlors, came on snatches, from far away. “Gaston!” he cried. “For God’s sake — Gaston!” At the same moment a shadow took shape in that awful whiteness before him, — the awful whiteness of a midnight snow-storm which has neither darkness nor light, — and Gaston staggered up, fell again across the

doorstone, like an avalanche of snow; rose half on the arm of Beaudesfords, half on the relief of finding an end to his fierce and toilsome endeavor, while Beaudesfords dragged him across, and with all his force threw the door back upon the windy drifts, shutting themselves in once more with light and rest; then drawing him down the hall to his own den like a whirlwind of force and fury himself, while Catherine moved back into the parlors,—but not till Gaston too, half dead with weariness as he was, had seen the wild white face that searched the storm for him.

“I thought I had lost you this time, Gaston!” exclaimed Beaudesfords, as soon as he had made the other swallow some champagne. “My God! I suffocated with you! How black the world grew to me of a sudden! Life would not be worth a rush without you, I found, in that second before you rose. You and Catherine *are* my life!”

Pale as Major Gaston’s face was with fatigue, it grew livid with Beaudesfords’ words. He had not one murmur to reply. He closed his eyes till the black lashes lay on the cheek below like that of a corpse. His heart stood still, his head fell forward and drooped upon his breast, as if he were ashamed that even the universal air should

see his face. He put away Beaudesfords' arm, and rose from his seat himself.

"So, you don't give me the slip after all?" cried Beaudesfords. "A moment since I wouldn't have given that for your chances!" snapping his fingers gayly. "By Jove! you've not nine lives, but ninety."

"I've not crossed a hundred cañons to founder between here and the mill. Train snowed up," he added, in a different tone.

"And you walked the five miles? I will call Frye, and you shall go to bed at once, and be rubbed down like a racer!" said Beaudesfords. "Some more champagne! How could you do such a silly thing! To-morrow a fever may finish you! Have you the strength of a Titan to heave yourself through these hills of snow?"

"Do nothing of the sort," said Gaston. "I shall be well enough when I get my breath."

"And drenched, of course."

"That is soon remedied. Then a breath, I say, and I'll not" —

"Call the king your uncle?" Beaudesfords stood before him, putting a hand on either shoulder, and looking him in the face with those glad and honest eyes of his. "But I thank God I

have you safe!" he said. Then sounded a truce to all emotion of that nature by ringing lustily for Frye; and in an hour Gaston was sitting at one side of the drawing-room fire, renovated as to his apparel, but pallid with his fatigue.

"Will you give Gaston some hot tea, Catherine?" asked Beaudesfords.

"Cyril shall," beckoning the passing servant with the tray.

"No; but take it to him yourself. It is only a slight condescension. When a man is ill and tired, and has no real home of his own, such things touch."

"Perhaps, then, Mamma had best: she is dispensing it."

"Nonsense, bonnibel! we are making a great affair out of nothing! Show my friend another spark of interest yourself."

Catherine took a cup that had just been filled, and carried it across the room.

"You must drink this," she said softly, looking not at Gaston, but at the cup.

"Thank you, no." He remembered Beaudesfords, and his love, like that of a woman's. He had been thinking he would leave the place. He would have nothing at her hands.

“But you must, he says. It will perhaps hinder a fever: you were so cold and wet. Or else, indeed, you may die.”

With her voice, that shook ever so slightly, addressing him, her hand extended toward him, her face drooping above him, so gentle, so lovely, so near,—her sweet breath touching his forehead,—with the mad quickening of his pulse, shame, remorse, Beaudesfords, honor, were flung off, he held his hand half-way for the cup as he rose and stood before her, the fire behind throwing out all his profile in a black relief.

“And if I do?” said he. “Is there any thing better than dying? If the cup holds life,—shall I drink it?”

She trembled an instant as he spoke, with his eyes bent upon her: then she had left the cup in his hands, and was gone; and Gaston drained it at a breath. A simple thing; but Beaudesfords, following her with his glance to observe the graceful action, saw into what earnest pantomime it turned, and wondered as he saw.

Old Dr. Ruthven strolled down that end of the room where Gaston sat alone. “My friend,” said he, “you must have some hell-fire in you since all that snow and ice outside has not chilled

it!" And Gaston, replying as curtly, strode away to his western wing.

That night, when Catherine dismissed her maid, she pulled away her curtains and looked out with her brow bent upon the cold glass. She seemed herself to be resting in a state of well-being: within it was all so warm and rosy; but without a white frenzy of storm was rushing by the pane, scourging it with sleet, mounting in mighty gyres, and driving up a black immensity of the midnight vault. War of wind and cloud, darkness of desolation, the great cry of the elements sweeping overhead through the gaping gulfs of space. Of a sudden Catherine cowered, — a mere atom she; then her sense of insignificance, under all these prodigious forces of sky and storm, opened out into a sense of sin and tumult as vast as they, — bloom and warmth dropped from her, she shivered away to her pillow, and wept there half the night long.

IX.

A FEVERISH dream in the gray of the morning; and then the day broke, the clear and crystalline day, with calm and peace on all the outer earth, with cheer and good-will at all its hearths. Joyous salutations floated to Catherine before she left her rooms: daylight, that shuts the world in upon itself and robs it of all large outlook into heaven, shut Catherine in as well upon the moment that was passing.

“No church to-day!” cried Rose. “The Beaudesfords teams are going out to break the roads,—the heavy drags. And Beaudesfords says we may all go with them. Such sport!”

“All but me,” moaned Caroline, who had entered her appearance at an earlier hour than usual that morning, roused by the gay stir and bustle of the house.

“No, indeed, Caroline! I shall not go,” said Catherine.

While she spoke, she saw the train of horses, shaking off the music of their peals of bells, the great dray-horses for which the Beaudesfords place was famous, trampling past the window, with the sledges that they drew well heaped with rugs and skins. Beaudesfords had taken the reins from the teamsters ; and Gaston, looming in the light, rode the leader, — a wild and powerful creature, little accustomed to harness or to bridle.

“ No, no, Catherine ! ” cried Beaudesfords, as she followed the others to the door, with an end of her breakfast-scarf thrown across her hair. “ I cannot trust you on such a break-neck expedition ! It is one of Rose’s freaks, — Rose and Gaston’s. She would chill to death : would she not, Gaston ? ”

“ Cold withers japonicas,” said Gaston, but without looking up, while he curbed his prancing beast.

“ I did not think of it, dear Beaudesfords,” she answered.

Beaudesfords, standing aside while his guests were crowding on the teams, flung his reins loose one moment, sprang up the steps, and, as if gently forcing her within, seized both her hands and kissed them, and flew down again. She felt the

pressure on those hands long after all the mad-caps were out of sight.

"I'm sure I don't see the use of your staying at home with me," exclaimed Caroline, "if you're going to roam the house in this way, like an unquiet spirit."

"Shall I read to you, Caroline dear?" her sister asked.

"As if Susette couldn't read to me! No: I want you to sit still and talk. I want to know what you think about Rose and Gaston. How he follows her with his eyes! Mamma says it's a sick whimsey. *Do* you think it is, Catherine? Beaudesfords has always promised Rose a handsome portion; so they can afford it. *I* like it. Though of course *that's* no matter! I like Major Gaston: he's one of the Satanic sort,—run you through, and make nothing of it; the Festus lovers, though, that Rose says do not cut up into good husbands. I wonder nobody ever thinks of *my* marrying."

Caroline was complaining to the empty air. Catherine had moved away from her as a ship sails,—moved down the long suite from the breakfast-room, and out, and away.

"Well, I declare," groaned Caroline, lying on

Catherine's sofa, eating Catherine's dainties, and sipping Catherine's coffee, "Catherine takes no more interest in her family than if such people didn't exist on the face of the earth!"

Rose and Gaston! Rose and Gaston! Beaudesfords had spoken of them; so Caroline had. Rose and Gaston! Catherine kept repeating the phrase as a bell tolls on the wind. The thought of its association bewildered her. She held her head in both hands as she went up and down her own room. What was the pomp of that place to her now? She never noticed it,—the place for which Beaudesfords had ransacked Europe,—its satin flutings and Venice lace, its paintings on sheets of gold and blocks of lapis-lazuli, its vase that some Etrurian woman had heaped with flowers three thousand years ago, its tiny water-clock that had measured the hours once for some Roman woman perhaps as wretched as herself: she neither saw nor remembered any of it. One thought only ruled her,—a tent in the desert would have answered just as well to think that thought in. If only Gaston loved another woman, how much more easily she might tread the path before her. But she knew better! she knew better. And Gaston had no right to Rose,—

too ignoble, too unworthy: if he were a good man, he would not now be here. He never should possess her! Then came over her the quick doubt lest she deceived herself by a mere sophism, and were simply barring him about from escape, fearful of Rose or any other woman.

As still she paced the place, when some hours had elapsed, there came the rush of the sledges and their bells, the trampling of the great dray-horses, the chorus of gleeful voices. Catherine fell on her knees behind the window-curtain and looked out. She had all at once grown guilty enough to need the shelter of those clinging folds. It was Gaston only at whom she gazed, — Gaston, whose restive horse plunged and swerved and reared in his long loose traces, while the rider seemed a part of him, and pulled him up till, poised in the air and outlined upon the dazzling snow, both horse and rider might have been hewn from black marble. Her eyes grew to him, and gazed and gazed. What was the force of this man? What made it? Where lurked it? Not beauty, for Beaudesfords had that; not goodness, for Beaudesfords' life was a sacrifice to others. His identity — himself — only himself — Gaston! She forgot the conceal-

ment of the curtain, bending forward, following him. He looked up, and for one moment, bold and steady, caught and kept those wild and eager eyes. Then she sank upon the floor, and, her face hidden in her loosened hair, grovelled out of sight.

What time had passed, impossible to say. She stirred at the sound of Beaudesfords' foot and voice, as he approached in search of her. He was singing the hymn that they had heard in church not many days before, — absently forgetting it was no festival song. He had a full, rich tenor voice, that at other times it was a pleasure to hear echoing through those long and lofty halls in its clear, golden strains; but now each note pierced her ears like a stab: —

“For me these pangs his soul assail,
For me this death is borne;
My sins gave sharpness to the nail,
And pointed every thorn.

“Let sin no more my soul enslave;
Break, Lord, its tyrant chain;
Oh! save me, whom thou cam'st to save,
Nor bleed, nor die, in vain.”

He sauntered through the gallery, looking at the handsome, honest faces of the old Beaudes-

fords portraits that lined the wall, repeating and dwelling on the last verse, unmindful what it was. But as for Catherine, listening to him, she arose; and it was like a human being transformed to some vile shape of elf or newt that the advance of morning touches with a sunbeam and sets free. She seemed to grow a loftier stature as she stood.

“I am not vile!” she cried. “I will not live in this bondage to sin. I will blot out this man — this Gaston. I will conquer, or I will die!”

As Beaudesfords entered, and she faced him, shaking out all her fallen locks of palest gold, her cheeks vivid, her eyes flashing, she looked — more than she had ever looked before — like the spirit of some great rose full-blossomed in the noon. He stood still, almost transfixed with the sight of her beauty, that blazed so upon him. And, while he gazed, the voluptuous color faded, and left the cheeks white, and only the eyes shone out, so full of purpose and endeavor that they were like the stars of heaven. And, while he gazed, he thought he heard her murmur again those words, — unconscious that she spoke, —

“I will conquer, or I will die!”

X.

CATHERINE had Olympe in to arrange her fallen hair, and then followed Beaudesfords below. He ran lightly down the stairs, like a boy, glancing back and calling her to hasten; while she lingered, leaning over the baluster, and looking, in her ermined wrapper and with the set bloom upon her face, as if she had just stepped forth from one of the old carved frames that lined the walls,—the last lady of Beaudesfords. Gaston turned silently as she came in, and thrilled, perhaps, to think that all that unwonted color and fire had kindled in the long look they interchanged a half-hour since.

Catherine surveyed the joyous faces that clustered round the luncheon-tables, she listened to the quips and cranks, and wondered what cross-purpose of fate it was that had overtaken her, and wrought her life, which should have been as smooth as theirs, into such a tangled snarl. A kind

of fever burned within her, and gave her a parched, dry, and dusty feeling: she was like one perishing of thirst in the desert, with all manner of illusive mirages of palm-plumed water-springs in sight, — for her heart ached for love, and there was Beaudesfords', and it was nothing to her. Who could help her? Rose, to be sure, pretty, laughing Rose. But she had never dreamed of her sister's trouble: why darken her innocent sunshine with such shadows? There was her mother. Unfortunately Mrs. Stanhope was more foreign to all the needs of Catherine's nature than if she spoke another language; she would neither sympathize, nor understand, nor overpower; she would be but indignantly scandalized, — which was only to her credit, she would have said, had matters been explained to her. And as for Caroline, that young woman in the whole course of her life had never been of any more use to anybody than a rag baby. And then, as her rapid thoughts ran on, while she shrank more silently within herself than ever, feeling like a guilty wretch among all these sinless people, — if any such there are, — her eye lighted on Dr. Ruthven.

Who has not had a family physician whose

touch was healing; whose words were balm; whose kind, keen eye searched many a disease to its seat in the soul; whose smile was comfort; whose knowledge, though it compassed the world and filled you with awe, was yet lost in his gentleness; to whom one turned as to the dispenser of life and death; to whom one told those burdens of sorrow no father-confessor ever heard; who was a staff to strengthen, an arm to uphold, a god to give health? Dr. Ruthven was not different from his order, — a kind, brave, sagacious gentleman. He had made his round of calls that morning after the drags had broken out the roads, and had been peremptorily brought back to Beaudesfords by its master. Catherine looked at him, and a course of action or of physic rose before her mind. She never dreamed of the time when another might go to him as she to-day intended. A quick suggestion flashed upon her, — of how many subtle, gentle, viewless poisons he must know, that would so soon medicine her to that sleep unvisited by dreams of sin and struggle. She crossed to his side and sat down, meaning to lead him to speak of such secrets of his art. But then came the thought that this trial was a thing of her destiny, after all: if she contrived to escape

it in this life, in the next it might be all to endure over again; and since already she had suffered the half of it here, why seek to renew the whole there? And so — restrained by no other scruples, for Catherine, it is unnecessary to say, was not yet a religious woman, she had found no rock to cling upon when washed by overwhelming seas — she said nothing at all.

Perhaps the Doctor was pleased with the little compliment of her singling him from among all these gayer guests: he was playing with his dry wine and biscuit, and put them away as she sat down between him and the fire; for there was nothing set about luncheon at Beaudesfords, — except the viands, — and people did just as they chose. He stretched out his artful hand and took her wrist.

“Physician’s privilege,” he said. “What is the meaning of all the red roses?”

“’Twould be no stranger sight to see
Red roses blooming in the snow.’

A little fever?” continued the Doctor. “I have noticed in the way of my practice that in summer all diseases are inflammatory, as you may say; in winter they all partake of a typhoid

character. My dear, there is nothing typhoid in this pulse."

"Why should there be, Doctor?"

"Your pulse is always a slow one, somewhat heavy, different from that beating wire which springs like a repeater in Gaston's wrist, — ah! ah! ah!" cried the Doctor suddenly, but half under his breath.

Catherine snatched her hand away, angry and injured.

"Have I sprung a trap upon your confidence?" said the unabashed old Doctor, looking over his glasses. "My dear, we probe some things to relieve them."

It was just at that moment, as Gaston had sauntered to the other side of the fender and stood looking down at the two, with their drama of one moment's span, that Beaudesfords — who had taken up an open book of ballads which some one had brought from the library, and laid, face down, upon the table — strolled in between them, and took up his position on the rug, with his back to the fire, glancing through the volume.

"The sweetest verse in the world," he said. "Catherine, it always puts me so in mind of

you," turning toward her, for the four were quite by themselves on that side of the room. "Do you remember it?"

' Once I kissed Sir Cradocke
Beneath the greenwood tree,
Once I kissed Sir Cradocke's mouth
Before he married me,' —

only it was not you, but I!"

If Dr. Ruthven had held her pulse then, what a leap he would have had to cry out at! The picture of that star-lit night, with Gaston's face bending toward her own beneath the swinging tree-shadows, started so vividly before her eyes that it seemed to dazzle her to tears: she felt the tears springing up full and hot; and, holding them back till they almost scalded her brain, she bit her lip in a sudden desperation, and then the blood gushed out in a spirt.

At the sight, Gaston sprung to seize her with a single impulse. Beaudesfords dashed down his book. But Dr. Ruthven had been before them both, had caught her handkerchief and pressed it to her mouth as if the danger were from something more than a bitten lip, had pulled her to her feet, and pushed and helped her through the door, and had her in her own room, with Olympe

running this way, and Rose that, and Mrs. Stanhope the other, ere either of the two had entirely recovered his senses.

“Only a hemorrhage,” said the old deceiver, reappearing after a few seconds for his prescription-book, which had fallen from his pocket. “Only a brief hemorrhage. This extreme cold produces a slight congestion. Frequent occurrence. No danger,—no danger with proper care, that is. Must be kept perfectly still. No company. Her own room. Beaudesfords, can you send for this at once?” And he handed him the cabalistic scrawl which means so much, but which in this case meant but a mild concoction of harmless trifles.

“Give it to me,” said Gaston, hoarse and quick.

“No, indeed, Major Gaston,” replied the Doctor, blandly. “We do not trouble our guests with such errands.”

Gaston drew back at once, as the sky blanches before a light: he saw in that sudden light the nature of the attack as plainly as Dr. Ruthven did. Alarm, as those lips reddened, had, for the first moment, blotted ballad and Beaudesfords and every thing else from mind.

Beaundesfords was throwing the saddle over his swiftest horse himself, as Gaston sauntered back again to the frightened groups that were gathered in questioning and answering about the event, and then, still as leisurely and unconcerned, sauntered away to his quarters in the western wing.

"Hurry! Hurry!" cried Beaundesfords to his apothecary, as he handed him the prescription, a half-hour later.

"I should not suppose there was occasion for any particular despatch," said the compounder of simples, measuring out his drops with precision. "If any one lies at the point of death, a little red lavender, ammonia, and camphor-water will hardly bring him back."

Beaundesfords took the vial, and, vaulting into his saddle, was half-way home before the words recurred to him. But they did recur, — idly and passingly, — yet sufficiently to show that, though he took no notice of them just now and they had no peculiar significance for the moment, they were pictured upon his memory for that future period which should make them, and a hundred other things of their kind, start out in a fiery charactery.

XI.

MAJOR Gaston's door having closed upon him did not open for himself again on that day or the next. The storm had prevented further advance with the great water-works which had employed him; his servant brought him the black coffee on which at that time he principally subsisted; Mrs. Stanhope had a tiny French dinner faultlessly served for him alone each day, and regretted that he was too ill to enjoy it; she had feared he was overworking himself, she said. She paid him a visit; but the smoke-permeated atmosphere, the fearful confusion of the apartments, the taciturnity of the yellow Major, were combining influences which caused the visit to be a short one, and she felt herself excused from repeating it, by sending the French dinner and the Doctor every day in her stead.

"Hm — ahem!" uttered the sturdy Doctor, not to be daunted by all the Majors in existence. "It

is plain that the air of Beaudesfords does not agree with you — does not agree with you. And the sooner you leave it the better.”

“I am not ill,” said the Major. “I wish you and Mr. Beaudesfords would attend to your own affairs. When I want a physician, I order one.”

“Perhaps the physician wants you.”

“Well,” turning on him suddenly, “what does he want of me?”

“Possibly to quit the place. Possibly such a great healthy fellow hulking round is an eyesore, — eh? Possibly, Gaston, possibly he takes a genuine interest in your health, which is not, after all, such alarming health, — you yellow fellow — need sea-air, — and is sincere in advising you to leave Beaudesfords.”

“Do you advise Mrs. Beaudesfords to leave it too? or did you say *him*?” with a sneer worthy of the father of sneers.

“That is not your affair. However, I fear I may have to order her a warmer climate.”

“We might all go together then. A charming party, Doctor!” As Gaston stood before the fire in the room that was growing dark, a strange glow came into his eyes, and illumined his bitter

smile. He looked more like a thing of evil than he was.

“Let me have your pulse, sir,” said Dr. Ruthven, possessing himself of it after the fashion of medical men, before the patient knew how to resist, and opening out his watch that had beat out so many of its seconds over men’s hearts. “Nervous system highly wrought,” muttered Dr. Ruthven. “Bromide of potassium — dessert-spoonful every three hours. Nothing like it — mere magic. Now your tongue.”

Gaston waited, before complying with this last demand, which was apparently too humiliating to be borne, till the Doctor had replaced his time-piece; then he took him by the shoulder and reseated him in his chair, so quietly but so potently that there was no appeal.

“Now, sir!” said he, “I told you I was not ill. I keep my quarters, being absolute master of them, thanks to — not to you, Dr. Ruthven!”

“No, sir! Not by the holy poker, sir! Not to me, you may take your affidavit!”

“Life is not all play, even to me, Dr. Ruthven,” continued Gaston, without noticing the little man’s outburst. “I draw my plans, clear

up my details. The guests survive without me. I choose to be alone just now, sir, because I am working out a problem! Good-morning!"

"Good-evening!" said the Doctor. "Don't confuse the hours of the day, whatever you do. I hope you will not forget the most important quantity in your problem—one which people laboring under high nervous excitement are apt to overlook. I think you had better try the bromide, though. Good-night!"

Then Gaston filled his huge pipe, and when Beaudesfords came in, he could by no means have discovered the whereabouts of his friend, had it not been for the spark of fire glittering at the mouth of the big bowl, and looking as much like the single eye of some monster glowering through the darkness as any thing that could be imagined.

"Tartarus?" said he. "Or the Black Hole? Ruthven said you were at work on your problems: you must be extracting the root of all darkness. Why haven't you rung for lights?"

"Let me alone, Beaudesfords. I love the dark."

"Because your deeds are evil? Well—land at last—a glimmer in the grate, that is; an-

chored — that's a chair. Now, what did Ruthven think of you?"

"Thought I had better go away from Beaudesfords."

"Go away!" cried Beaudesfords, starting to his feet. "What! is the air unhealthy here? Is it that ails Catherine?"

"Not in the least. He spoke merely in relation to myself. Life is too pleasant for me here. It is time I was up and away on my rounds, like the outcast Jew."

"Fie, fie, old fellow! Don't put on your misanthropes. Ruthven is only a good, pottering soul — fancies you rusting out. You never shall leave Beaudesfords with my consent. See, we are going to have a railway laid to the bay now. The straight line, you know, lies across as many pretty difficulties as anybody wants to overcome in a summer's day. When the water-works are opened and done with, you will have your contract to lay it out. What say to that? Headquarters at Beaudesfords, and a year's job if a day's. Some of our directors were here to see me this morning about it. No danger for you of rusting, even at Beaudesfords. It is I who should rust without you. In fact, Gaston, though I

wonder what existence would be to me without Catherine, I wonder quite as often what it would be to me without you! I couldn't say it," added Beaudesfords, like a girl, "if it wasn't as dark as your pocket!"

Poor Beaudesfords! He could not have said it at all, had Catherine ever given him the bliss of being loved in return with the decimal of that devotion which he lavished on herself. But he was an effusive nature, and, having broken the ice on the night of the great snow-storm by a tantamount assurance, it was necessary for him to attest the fact again, and yet again, lest it were only deemed the impulse of a moment.

But as for Gaston, he answered not a word. And the two sat there silent in the darkness; Beaudesfords a little despondent about his wife, but not positively unhappy, turning over a thousand things in his mind; but Gaston, chafing with hateful thoughts, finding it impossible to speak, and yet every instant of the prolonged silence getting more unbearable than the last. Suddenly he was upon his feet, had snatched both of Beaudesfords' hands and wrung them, crying, "What should such fellows as I do, crawling between earth and heaven!" had pushed him back

again, found his own hat, and stalked from the room.

“That was just like Gaston!” said Beaudesfords to Catherine, when he was detailing to her the conversation and its close, on the same evening, alone with her in her own sitting-room. “To sit mulling over my words, when I had forgotten all about them, and suddenly to burst out in such a blaze! What a soul he is! Noble from heart to lip! One of those men that wear the purple,—that were born in it,—porphyro-gene! When was there ever such a man before? It is no wonder that I love him, Catherine! You are not jealous of him, eh?” with a smiling side-long glance.

“Jealous of Gaston!”

“Ah! true. How is it possible? I think you are better to-night, Mrs. Beaudesfords,” gazing at her again a moment as he spoke. “There is such a color on your cheeks, such a light in your eyes, that I have half the mind to bring him up here to tea.”

Catherine looked at herself in the great glass as he spoke: it was an image but little like a sick woman's that she saw there, with that triumphant flush and brilliance which had risen as she had

heard Gaston praised, as she had felt that he was not altogether vicious, — a short-lived rapture on such false foundation. If he were not vicious, why did he linger here ?

“ You seem so much improved indeed,” continued Beaudesfords.

“ No, no, no !” cried Catherine, hastily. “ I mean the Doctor said,” she added, “ that I must see no one, — that ” —

“ He was right,” interrupted Beaudesfords. “ I am an idiot. Happiness makes a man lose his senses, they say ; and since I see you look so well, I feel like snapping my fingers at fate.”

“ Do not talk so, Beaudesfords,” said Catherine. “ Read to me. There are the new books that came to-night. I had them brought on purpose, because you like to open them so, and I like to see you.” And Beaudesfords, cutting the leaves of one at random, plunged into poetry of such bewildering waste of passion and power, such mad melody and rhythm, that, seeing Catherine fall asleep, worn out with all the emotions that had their battle-ground every day in her heart, he stole softly from the room, and then took the great staircase at three leaps, with the book in hand, that he might break in upon Gas-

ton's quarters, and waking him from his black apathy revel there with Swinburne, in a symposium of splendid image and luxurious music till midnight.

XII.

THE winter days went slipping by, and Beaudesfords still kept the place filled with guests, and Catherine still kept her room. Beaudesfords would have recalled his invitations and dismissed his friends, but Catherine would not listen to it: she had double reason indeed to wish his house and his hands full, just now, that he might be diverted from too close attention on her retirement. One would have thought that, having tried that experiment of seclusion in the early days of her return home, its failure would have answered. But she had no option about it; for Dr. Ruthven, though small in body, was the greatest tyrant that ever ruled. She was not obliged to complain of any symptoms, — Dr. Ruthven did that for her: he made her walk up and down in the open air on her high balcony, that commanded such a wide outlook of country; took care that her diet was all as it should be; and by

degrees, when he had seen that her room was darkened rightly, all in an unostentatious way, and as a physician is wont to do, he invited up one guest and another to wile away an hour, to let her know the gossip below ; while Beaudestons had a company of musicians brought from a distant city, that, stationed in the hall, made delicious murmuring of violin and flute, not for Catherine alone, but for every one that chose to listen. Gaston threw open his doors sometimes, and suffered the spell of music to work, if perchance it might cast out his devils ; but it needed a mightier magician even than music to effect so much as that.

Gaston, meanwhile, had shut himself up during these three weeks in his own apartments as well : it seemed possible that he intended to return only when Catherine herself returned ; and as Caroline and Mamma Stanhope plied her with the details of all transactions below, so at least Catherine interpreted it. He did not choose to be eluded by any such evasion as her mock illness : he meant to force her back by staying away himself till she came. It seemed to Catherine cruel, even then, cruel on Gaston's part, to stand so between her and safety, — safety, which meant

virtue, peace, heaven. Dr. Ruthven did not need much feigning in his meddlesome and benevolent device ; for the conflict of feeling left Catherine every day more pale and worn, every night more feverish and impatient.

She was just stepping in one evening from the balcony, that opened from her sitting-room and extended far enough down one side of the house, blank just there of windows, to allow her a sort of promenade, and Olympe had removed her wrappings and carried them away, when Beaufords tapped upon the door, peered in, and then put his head and hand back in the hall, and drew in Gaston after him.

“She doesn’t look like a martyr to disease, does she, Gaston, with such a rose-petal of a cheek? Dr. Ruthven is a tyrant. Death to all tyrants, say I! I shall have you downstairs to-morrow, my lady. Good heavens, how cold your hands are!”

“I have just come in from the balcony,” said Catherine, losing the color the wind had fanned up on her cheek. But she did not tell him that when she came in her hands were warm and well.

Tea was served for the three ; and Rose flitted in and made them four. Catherine leaned back

in her chair, growing whiter and whiter, and, while Rose and Beaudesfords fenced out their gay dialogue, gave no response of word or smile.

It seemed to her as if fate were fighting against her, — as if she felt the game go on between good angels and bad, herself the stake ; and when she glanced up, and Gaston stood before her and bent from his height and said some gentle thing in a tone whose tenderness was all the more enhanced because that tone was usually so haughty and so brief, she shuddered to think she saw the dark angel in person, to think how he possessed her ; and then she thrilled and thrilled to look at him, all her soul seemed welling up into her eyes, she could not move them from their fascinated gaze, her hands trembled and her lips, her head fell on one side, and she would have swooned had not Gaston himself caught her, and had not the knowledge of his touch acted like an electric stroke to call her back to herself, to this strange being of hers, half-filled with such wild joy as she looked at him, half with as wild abhorrence of herself, and bathed, besides, all through and through with pity for Beaudesfords, and sorrow. She used to think she was insane, that some evil spirit acted through her, since she found it so impossible to

reconcile her conscience and reason with this passion of her senses and her heart, to understand why in herself alone the flesh and the spirit so contended. She ought to scorn him, she said, since he betrayed her; she ought to hate him that he lingered here to torment her; and instead — but she would not utter to herself that pitiful instead. Only she had not the strength to forbid Beaudesfords to bring Gaston any more to the room, to keep her eyes off him with their greedy gaze when he was there. Only all the time she hated bitterly those honest, happy Beaudesfords women on the wall! It was a kind of rapt and trance-like happiness while he remained: after he was gone, came the misery and shame. Once it occurred to her to ask herself what had become of her resolve of that bright Christmas morning, the resolve that she would conquer or she would die. Well, she answered, she could not conquer, but perhaps she could die! Heaven help her and let her die!

Gaston came now with Beaudesfords every evening. Dr. Ruthven knew nothing about it. He sat opposite Catherine, the little tea-table between them: he waited on her in a dozen trivial ways, and the blind Beaudesfords felt

nothing but delight in believing that the friendship between his friend and his wife was springing up so sweet and strong. Every night Gaston brought some large and lovely flower, freshly full-blown, from the green-house, and gave it to her: their hands touched as they gave and took, loitered perhaps one trembling moment; and while she held it and gazed down upon it and caressed its petals, it half seemed to her that it still was Gaston's hand she held. She was weak and pale, tender and appealing: a man's heart would have been stone which in some way in those days she did not touch. And yet she could hardly hold herself to be like any polluted thing; for Gaston's very tenderness was so lofty; he never used word or expression beyond that silent manner, in appearance so full of deep respect; yet, for all that, she knew the truth,—his tone told it, his delaying eyes enforced it. In fact, she was ceasing already to make any effort, fancying herself controlled by some fatal charm, questioning if she should not take what bliss she found, shutting her eyes and glad to be drifting — drifting.

XIII.

CATHERINE had kept her own rooms for about five weeks, — for sometimes she lacked the inclination and sometimes the courage to go down, nor had Dr. Ruthven, still maintaining his fiction, yet given his consent that she should do so, — when Candlemas came — came to break the back of the winter, as some one said. The January thaw had just passed over all the white world, and the snow-covered expanse of the long lawn and level field beneath her windows had been washed with the rain, and flooded and frozen in an icy glare. Beaudesfords and Gaston sat round the little tea-table with Catherine, having left Mrs. Stanhope and Rose with enough upon their hands below. There came a rap upon the lower door, and May, the gardener's little daughter, entered timidly and presented Mrs. Beaudesfords with an offering from her father, — a single scarlet blossom, the offshoot of a rare plant that the gardener had been secretly

fostering and urging for a surprise ; since Mrs. Beaudesfords in her floral fury, as her husband used to call it, had often worked with McRoy in the conservatory, and had established with him a pleasanter acquaintance than with her other servants.

She took the fiery flower, and set it in a glass before her, where it seemed to throw a lustre round the table, while Beaudesfords detained May with a shower of little silver pieces, and set her to singing her particular gypsy ballad which was always such a delight to him for its oblivion of the laws of prosody and ballad-making in general, and which the child sang with such an abandonment to the tune and want of understanding of the burden that the effect reached that one step from the sublime. Beaudesfords and Gaston, leaning back in their chairs, laughed a choral accompaniment, which, however, in nowise disconcerted the little girl, who, with her eyes fastened on the scarlet flower, still sang on unconcerned, — an old ballad, once perhaps in the Scottish manner, but which, in its passage through the memory of May's grandmothers and great-grandmothers, had lost much of its rhyme and nearly all its reason.

“There were seven gypsies in a gang,
They were both brisk and bonny, O ;
They came to the Earl of Castle’s house,
And the songs they sang were many, O.

Earl Castle’s wife came down the stair,
And all her maids before her, O ;
As soon as they saw her well-fared face,
They cast the glamor o’er her, O.

They gave to her a nutmeg brown,
And also of the ginger, O ;
She gave to them a better thing,
The ring from off her finger, O.

The Earl would hunt in Maybole woods,
For blithesome was the morning, O,
Following the deer with the yelping curs,
And the huntsman’s bugle sounding, O.

Earl Castle’s wife came down the hall
To have a crack at them fairly, O ;
‘And oh !’ she cried, ‘I will follow thee
To the end of the world, or nearly, O !

‘So take away my silken gown,
And bring a highland plaidie, O ;
Though kith and kin and all had sworn,
I’ll go with my gypsy laddie, O !’

When our good lord came riding home
And spiered for his fair lady, O,
The tane she cried, and tither replied,
‘She’s away with the gypsy laddie, O !’

‘Oh, saddle me my milk-white mare
Because she goes so speedy, O !

I'll ride all day, and I'll ride all night,
To overtake my lady, O !

' How could she leave her children three,
How could she leave her baby, O,
To follow under the greenwood tree
Along with a gypsy laddie, O !'

He rode beside the river's bank,
With its waters black and dreary, O ;
When he espied his wedded wife, —
She was cold and wet and weary, O.

And we were fifteen well-made men,
Although we were not bonny, O ;
And we were all put down but one
For a fair young wanton lady, O !''

All this poured forth to a charming tune, and with a voice like a bird's. Gaston and Beaudesfords saw only subject for merriment in song and singer. But Catherine leaned back, all hurt and humbled, while she sang, as if the hand of innocence had touched her guilt.

It was just at that moment that a thousand lights seemed suddenly to strike up the ceiling and drown the soft radiance of the shaded lamp in a myriad dancing flashes ; and before Catherine knew what had happened, Beaudesfords had wrapped her great fur mantle close about her and had thrown open the casement, and she was lean-

ing over the balcony's edge with May beside her, and was gazing down where all the lawn and level field were alive with twinkling sparks, ruby and emerald, azure and golden, that, borne by almost viewless shadows, circled and recircled and wove a tracery of brilliant flourishes till the whole field was brocaded with trailing lines of light. It was Candlemas; and Beaudesfords was keeping it in this fantastic way, having marshalled guests, tenants, and servants into his use for the pretty spectacle.

"How lively, how beautiful, how silent!" cried Catherine.

"It is the 'dance of the dædal stars,'" said Gaston.

"It is the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin," said little May, using the phrase she had caught from a servant's lips.

As Catherine heard the simple words last spoken, she shivered despite herself. How remote from her were beauty and purity, the festivals of holy people, the worship of holy women! All at once she was forlorn as some lost soul might be when gazing from the outside of a star upon the world of happy people moving there.

“You are cold?” exclaimed Gaston, and he reached his arm across to gather about her the heavy cloak that had slipped down where its rich fur was unconsciously trampled by May’s clumsy little feet. He gave it a sudden wrench to set it free, without thinking what he did: the child, leaning half over the low railing in her eagerness, lost her balance, pitched forward, and throwing up her hands with a sharp scream plunged head-long down upon the ice below, that glittered harder and colder than a rock.

As Catherine sprung forward to snatch at her, and snatch in vain, she was caught back herself with a smothered word; and for an instant her forehead felt the fierce pulsation of Gaston’s heart as it rocked beneath, while he too bent to learn the fate of the thing that lay in a little quiet heap below, and to which Beaudesfords, springing across the rail and swinging himself down, had dropped in less time than it takes to tell.

But as soon as Catherine had comprehended the thing,—it was but a half-dozen seconds first,—she broke from that restraining grasp, and sweeping through her room like the wind, was down the stairs, and out upon the ice with Beaudesfords, and in again, the child in her arms;

while Gaston, moved by some impulse new to him, had started for the Doctor.

“O my God!” she cried. “If I had not been keeping my room, this would not have happened! If Gaston had not pulled up my cloak for me, it could not have happened! Am I a murderer, a murderer — with all?”

It was Beaudesfords that heard her, too sorry, too much agitated, too busy in getting splints and bandages from the maids and Mrs. Stanhope and the housekeeper, to heed the meaning of any exclamations at such a time as that.

XIV.

THE terrible touch of pain, beneath Dr. Ruthven's hand, brought back the child to life, only for her to lose consciousness again, unable to bear its burden. The broken bones, one of which had been bruised almost to fragments, were set at last, and the child was put to rest in Catherine's bed, if rest there might be for her ; and Catherine hung over her night and day, refusing to yield her place to servants, sleepless and tireless, supported by the one wild fear lest the child should die and the blood be on her head. Gaston himself never imagined the real reason of her devotion : he supposed it to be but the natural treatment of a child by any woman. He only saw that Catherine through it all was very calm and composed where his own hand would have shaken. McRoy and his wife were as useless as two children themselves. They came into the room and sat stupidly staring at their child, and then

broke out into sobs and cries till they had to be taken away. Catherine was father and mother both to the suffering little thing that lay in her bed. The sudden horror had awakened her from her lethargy ; she saw the precipice to which the current on which she reposed had been bearing her ; she was alert and alive on her own behalf with watchful fire.

The guests had left the house to its hosts. Gaston roamed up and down the empty apartments like a shadow, galloped off to the water-works and back again at all unseasonable hours, as heated and unquiet as the blast of a sirocco. Caroline betook herself to her bed, and required in one day more nursing and attendance from Rose, her mother, and the maid, than the child whose life hung in the balance — and whom Beaudesfords and Catherine never left — required in all her illness. Catherine watched the Doctor's face at morning and night, as if her own salvation depended on it: for May grew worse with pain every hour, and at length, after a night of agony in which it seemed as if day might never dawn, or could only dawn in the blackness of death when it did come, Catherine left Beaudesfords with her charge, and ran over the crisp, white

fields to bring the Doctor herself, as the day began to issue gray and pallid from the night,—Beaundesfords unable to detain her, and feeling sure the clear cold outside air was only a needed tonic.

“Bring every thing!” she cried. “I am afraid — I don’t know what I fear! It may have mortified — you will have to amputate — Oh, if she only lives, no matter how, Beaundesfords will adopt her, for my sake,—we will make her our own child! Doctor, you must, you must save her!”

“I do not know,” said Dr. Ruthven, when he had examined the cause of alarm, and stepped into the adjoining room, “if it is best or not. Her parents should decide. Beaundesfords, call McRoy.”

But the man had been waiting without, summoned by Catherine as she returned to the house. The Doctor went up to him, and laid his hand on his shoulder. “My poor man,” he said, “if I perform this operation, in which, God granting, the child shall feel no particle of pain, she may live,—crippled, it is true, but well and happy, and cared for by these kind friends. If I do not perform it, she cannot live till night.”

“And why are ye waiting?” whispered the

gardener. "Haste! haste, man! Be quick with you,—and life and death hanging from your hands!"

"Oh, you are right, McRoy!" cried Catherine, though in no loud key. "But there is something to make us hesitate. She may not have the strength; and though she will not suffer—she will not suffer,—she may die before it is done."

"But there is a chance?" he asked, looking with strange, scared eyes from one to another.

"A chance," said Dr. Ruthven, "a chance,—not a certainty,—but a hope."

"Then out with your knife, sir, and never spare a thrust! Every cut will strike my heart, but I shall have my child when all's done,—my dear, my little May! We shall have her back—have her back!" And staying only to see Catherine's arm beneath her,—while strengthened by the fresh air she had inhaled in her run across the fields, and by her longing for the child's life, Catherine herself held the napkin and the blessed ether,—he was away to bring his wife, and wait, out of hearing of a groan, till the word of joy or of despair should be spoken.

As the gardener went down, Gaston met him on the stairway. His face, so whitened, and lately

grown old and furrowed, struck Gaston as if he had seen a ghost. Instead of seeking his own apartment, he went boldly onward, drawn, he knew not by what instinct or what fear, and paused in the inner doorway, and remained there looking on the scene, — whether he had no right to shelter himself from one stroke of that knife, — whether it was destined that he should see Catherine hold the child without a tremor, while the warm blood gushed upon her and offended her. Not a soul spoke, no one stirred, there was not a breath of sound, save that made by the swift movements of the Doctor. When it was all over, the bandages bound tightly down, the napkin taken away, and the Doctor had swallowed a glass of raw spirits to steady his hands, that had no innate love of surgery, and after their work was done began to shake like two leaves, then the child opened her eyes, wide and quiet, and gazed up at Catherine. “The angels will look like you,” she breathed: “I shall be one of them. Then I — shall take care of — you. I would — like to see my father.”

As if he had heard the half-articulate breath through walls and doors, McRoy was in the room, as it seemed, with a single bound, and down be-

side the bed with his head on his child's heart. May placed both her pretty hands in his hair, held up her face to Catherine for a kiss, — a trembling kiss, — and Catherine closed her eyes. Then the mother, who had followed her husband, all dazed and numbed, sat down in Catherine's seat, and gazed before her into the emptiness, and uttered at last a loud, wild cry. The Doctor went to her, knowing better how to solace her than any other could; and Catherine passed through the doorway where Gaston stood, and looked him level in the face with eyes that said, "Your work and mine!"

XV.

WHEN little May had been laid to her long rest, and the great house was still once more, the early days of March were beginning to blow their whistling breath, the snow had slipped from the hill-sides to the valleys, and McRoy's crocuses, to which he seemed to give his whole soul, had peeped up like risen spirits of the last summer from their white shroud beneath the windows and around the paths. Catherine had not kept her room another day: in fact, she dared not be left alone. She worked with her mother and sisters, she stood silently beside McRoy as he delved, she marched across the fields for miles with Beaudesfords. Beaudesfords said just such a sudden, nervous shock had been the thing she needed. If Gaston always came in for the end of these rambles taken by the two, and the quick walk home, Catherine never spoke to him a sentence beyond the ordinary courtesies of the occasion.

She fancied that he was silently establishing a right in her because of that mutual work of theirs, because of that confidence shared between them, and unknown to others. She rebelled against it, and never referred to the dead child; nor did she linger in his company, or suffer him to seek her own. In spite of all she had felt in the past or still felt in the present, the idea of even that partnership with Gaston was revolting to her. If,—ah, fatal if!—if she loved him, she loathed him too. She was not sure she did love him,—of the two it was not his happiness that she preferred: she never raised her eyes to look at him, she never listened when she heard his voice. As she became aware of this in her constant self-examination, she was glad, with a sort of stifled gladness, half believing she was about to overcome; and then as suddenly she feared that these were the effects of her will and not of her nature, that, if she refused to raise and rest her eyes on Gaston's face, it was because the image of that face was so deeply fastened in her soul that she had no need to raise her eyes to see what inwardly they so perpetually brooded over.

Spring was hastening forward now in all the

land: the rivulets and runnels had burst their icy scales asunder, and fringed their banks with such a callow green that they seemed the very highways by which she came. There was that delicious promise in the air that lightens every heart, and that ineffable fragrance that always precedes the full breaking of the blossom: the hope and happiness that start new-born with every year pervaded all the household at Beaudesfords,—all save Catherine. Beaudesfords himself was as full of mounting gayety as the tree-twigs are of sap hurrying to burst into leafage. Gaston sparkled in face and eye with joy of the fresh weather,—with a new determination. Do you know what the determination was? He was going away—when the water-works were finished.

For Catherine's part, she followed Beaudesfords about till Rose and Mrs. Stanhope made merry over such manifestations of devotion; and Mrs. Stanhope stroked her sleek fur every day, congratulating herself that she had known what was for her daughter's welfare better than that daughter herself had known. But in reality Catherine had wished to endeavor so to accustom herself to him that she might find it impossible to do

without him. She appealed to him on every trifle; she went to him with a thousand solitudes and confidences; she studied his pleasures as she had never done before; she tried with all her might to keep him ever before her, to make him the subject of her waking and her sleeping thoughts. Never had she been so humble, so small in her own estimation. She wondered one day, in looking in upon it, how she could ever have been of a large and lofty type enough to fill the ideal of the pure and passionless Veronica, the bride of Heaven himself. And after every thing was done, the whole endeavor and humility, the dark, scarred face would rise before her eyes and shut her out from all the world save that, as she had seen it first when standing with death at her feet, on that point of rock in the midst of the swelling waters. This life again then swept in a wave of warmth through all her blissful veins, and hope and heaven gleamed for her out of Arnold Gaston's eyes. Or else some dream of the night, some lawless dream, where Gaston reigned supreme, would lighten up a livelong day with an insane happiness,—till night again came, night and that intense inner loneliness which now had become so unbearable

to her, and in which peace and happiness were lost with every thing else but horror.

April, with all its blue sky and silver showers, had come and gone. It was May Day itself indeed; and Beaudesfords had stolen out to the woods for the sweet and spicy May-flowers which he loved, and with which he meant to surprise Catherine on his return. He forgot the disastrous end of the last surprise that had been studied with a flower. Perhaps he would have arranged it otherwise had he remembered; for there was just that atom of superstition about him to give salt to his caprices. One thing and another busied all the rest that morning. Catherine took up a book that she had seen Beaudesfords reading,—it was one of her devices by which, if Gaston were only away, she would have studied herself into all due regard for Beaudesfords,—and went with it into the conservatory, wandering through the alleys of the great, green palm-trees there, and sitting down at last in the warm and enervating atmosphere, impregnated with its deathly sweet scents and dyed with blossom tints of deepest azure and sharpest scarlet.

It was a version of an old Middle Age legend; and she had opened it at that place where the

knight, conscience-stricken with his own treachery to his king and friend, bids the lady farewell, and crosses to his castles in the remote land, remorse running at his stirrup. Catherine read the chapter listlessly, not taking much impression from its quaint old English, when suddenly a finger was stretched before her on the page,—the finger of a brown and nervous hand following along the lines,—and Major Gaston read out those words in which the betrayer of his friend speaks to his mistress in an eternal parting. And then, before the passage ended, his voice trembled and stopped, and Catherine saw a great tear drop upon the leaf. She turned her head slowly, and looked up at the reader where he leaned one arm on the stem of the tree, and the broad banana-leaf spread its green shelter over him and hung its clusters, like bunches of blood-tipped javelins, just beyond. Since he was going then,—since it was all over,—since this was the last,—the last, the first and last! His head bent towards her, as once before it had bent,—towards her face upturned like a flower to the sun,—and then a rustle, a foot-fall, a form,—McRoy, perhaps. Catherine started and picked up her fallen book, as Beaufords stooped to lift it for her.

She rose trembling and defiant to confront him ; but he tumbled the great pink bunches of the May-flower into her arms, looking at them with such an innocent face that she was simply amazed into silence. "Just see how the native, wild savor dissipates all these foreign scents, so rich and so unreal !" he exclaimed, as the wood-flowers asserted their sovereignty. "It is like a morning cock-crow scattering ghosts."

It was indeed. In the second that Catherine stood there, inhaling that delicious breath, she remembered all the days of her youth and her innocence, — countless truant noons when she was a child and Beaudesfords a boy, and they went wandering beneath the dark woodside shadows and burrowing in the moss and leaves to bring up the long brown wreaths loaded with their pink tufts of beauty. How her father had kissed her face all over once when she ran in with her hands full of the fragrant treasure ! And these false, false kisses for which a moment since she would have pledged her soul, — oh ! they stung, they stung ! How he kissed her, — her father, whom she had worshipped, and when she was young and innocent ! She gathered the armful of flowers to her heart, and bowed her face down and hid it in

the perfume of the soft petals. "Oh, Beaudesfords! how good you are to me!" she cried, before she knew it, lifting a streaming face and hurrying from the spot.

If Beaudesfords had till now been blind, he was so no longer! That face of Catherine's raised to the bending one above, that sudden start, that defiant turn, those streaming tears, those words, were like so many flashes of light. Slight things, but all that were needed. For in an instant a fabric rose before him complete from basement to battlement, — a cloud-built castle, that, try as he might to puff it away, still hung before his gaze, and out of whose every window Catherine looked with eyes of love on Gaston.

Without delaying to exchange a word with his remaining companion, Beaudesfords followed Catherine from the conservatory, and then plunged into his own den, up and down whose floor he walked or bounded, like a caged leopard, half the day. He was neither stunned nor stupefied, but awake and receptive to his very pores: he was writhing with pain at mistrusting Gaston, with pain at Gaston's treachery to him, with anger, with grief, with love for Catherine. That night on the river, when she and Gaston in the

boat ran down among the breakers, took a new meaning. If they had only told him at that time, that time not yet three years ago, before it had been too late! He would have forgotten himself; he would have compassed heaven and earth for them. It hurt him more than it maddened him. And then how was it possible to have such fears and fancies concerning his white-souled wife? Why had he exposed her to temptation? What woman ever withstood Gaston? Oh, if she had come to him and confided in him and begged him to take her away again, — how he would have forgiven, how he would have helped! Ah, why not leave the world and them together? Then, in hasty contradiction of all this, he endeavored to become convinced, as one thing started up after another in his memory, — that blush, that staining, branding blush with which his friend and wife had met on the day when she returned to her home and found him there; that face, that wild, white face, that on Christmas Eve searched the storm with him; their earnest pantomime a little after; her singing, and her saying, and her silence; her sudden illness and as sudden recovery; looks, sighs, tears, surprises, deeds, — that they were suspicions, base suspicions, and ground-

less. He raged and raved and spurned himself, a husband and a friend, for entertaining them. He recalled all Catherine's sweet submission of late, as she had followed him, yielded to him, humored him, studied him. He saw at least the effort: he felt as though he were the guilty one, since except for him no effort would be needed. He passed through into what had once been his own sleeping-room, the beautiful and spacious place with its casement opening on the garden and guarded by two giant firs; and when he was weary of gazing at the St. Veronica hanging there,—now more than ever like Catherine, as he thought,—he went out at last, declaring that he must have been mad, merely mad, nor could he insult his wife or Gaston by another doubt.

But suspicion is a serpent that, once startled, has its head erect and hissing ever afterwards.

Beaudesfords bent his steps to the river: the fresh air playing there would blow off all these megrims, he said. He waved his hand to Catherine in going, as he looked back at her sitting on her balcony, where she saw the long, large landscape bathed in the afternoon clearness of May; where she saw Gaston floating in his boat, and following in and out the windings of

the stream. A shadow darkened Beaudesfords' face, and swept away again, as a cloud sweeps its shadow over any sunny clover-field. He beckoned Gaston to take him on board ; and shaping their course up-stream, where the river ran in rapids between the hills, — the smooth outside of which rapids they were wont to skirt, and then come down like an arrow on their bosom, — they were soon out of sight.

Catherine had just risen to go in, an hour later, when the boat came slipping down again before the wind ; and she paused, standing there half-turned, to watch its great white sail take on the sunset tints, — listlessly, and with little interest in that, it seemed to her, or in any thing else in the world. She saw the rosy flush catch the sail, as she paused ; she saw the windy flaw from the hills following fast behind it on the surface ; she saw the boat rock and careen as the flaw struck it, saw it dip its sail far over and down ; she saw the two men in the water, struggling through the stream for shore, — and one she saw go down, — and one, the fair head, the fresh face, Beaudesfords', stood safe and whole upon the river-bank ; and had a bullet pierced her brain, she could not have dropped more instantly. Had she kept con-

trol of her pulses one moment longer, she would have seen Beaudesfords dash in and down again, and bring up his companion to the capsized boat's edge, till together they loosened the rope that had entangled and held him under, and together reached the shore once more, rather in glee over the adventure than in gloom over such an approach to disaster. "Cannot a woman faint with joy on finding her husband safe, as soon as with despair at finding his rival drowned?" asked Beaudesfords of himself by and by, when he had heard of Catherine's mishap. Yet reason with such willing sophistries as he might, something told him that sophistries they were; and from that day there was no more rest for Beaudesfords. The unconsidered atoms that had floated formlessly in mind and memory had taken shape and consciousness. It was the last setting of the crystal. "It is strange," said he to Gaston, in bidding him good-night, "that we need oblivion half our life in order to endure the other half."

XVI.

EVERY one within the walls of the great house of Beaudesfords felt now some ferment going on there: with the unconscious as well as with the conscious ones a strange agitation seemed to be everywhere present. Hearts beat and temples fluttered, and all alike had that sensation of presentiment which we feel in beginning to dread the neighborhood of some unknown evil.

It was not Gaston now that wrought out problems, but Beaudesfords, who, watchful as a lynx, was constantly putting two and two together: as if by some clairvoyant sympathy, he heard, he felt, he saw every thing; no tone, no glance, escaped him. One thing alone escaped,—the fact that Catherine desired of him the support and protection he had sworn to afford her, desired him to save her. But Beaudesfords was mortal, and bitter things began to work within him and bring his better nature to naught.

Catherine had seen now, with the positive assurance of one who comes face to face with a terrible consequence, that Gaston must go,—if rest, if any feeble goodness, if Beaudesfords, if life were hers, Gaston must go. Meanwhile, Gaston seemed to have changed rôles with Beaudesfords: it was he who had become restless, and almost gay, and irresolute withal, as the other never was; for still that determination of his hung on the cloud like a bow of promise, and because he meant to go he regarded himself as magnanimous as if he had already gone.

They were out-doors in the mild May weather almost constantly. Mrs. Stanhope, desirous never to grow so old as to be excluded from her children's pleasures, sent carpet and sewing-chair out on the green grass-plot. Even Caroline had a heap of afghans and cushions spread on the wicker garden-seats, where, after the sun was high, she reclined in elegant valetudinarianism, and fretted because Catherine and Beaudesfords were so stupid as to have no company in such an Italian season; while Rose and Catherine followed McRoy through the aisles and avenues, trimming and training, the one delighted, the other soothed, by helping bud and blossom to burst out freely into such happy sunshine.

Rose came up the garden one of these pleasant afternoons, followed by an artistic vagabond, who, wayfaring from town to town, had stopped at Beaudesfords to beg for a repast. She made him leave his basket of rude images in the path while she should take him round to Mrs. Grey, to be refreshed in the housekeeper's hospitable domain, and then came back herself to lift the cover from the basket and explore its contents.

"I always had a fancy for this sort of thing," said Rose, "and so had my lady Beaudesfords when she was plain Catherine. Caroline, now, was too grand: she would none of them" —

"Give her parian or give her death," said Gaston.

"But give *me* parian or give me plaster. Yes: to tell a secret, when Catherine and I have been in bliss over the sumptuousness of our parlor, decorated by a cream-colored Dante, price twenty cents, standing on a bracket, first painted green and then smeared with yellow-dust as a true and original bronze, then Caroline, with malice aforethought, has been known deliberately to smash the said Dante, and to wish she could do it again!"

"I'm sure I did!" said Caroline, with a

flicker of energy. "They were always nonsensical caricatures, false to art, and only true to poverty, which I detest!"

"Maybe," said Rose. "But Catherine and I love them. Catherine's own room here is half full of them. Do you know, Mrs. Beaudesfords, that sometimes you put me in mind of that Neapolitan beggar-girl who married a prince, and ate so little at table that they watched her, and found she secreted many and various crusts about herself, and when she entered her closet divided these crusts among the empty chairs and lounges there, and then humbly went round the room on her knees and begged of each chair and table its crust, and retiring into a corner with her gains munched away upon them to the tune of a hearty appetite?"

"Were poverty and Stanhope Cottage so much sweeter than the present?" asked Beaudesfords, with sudden rudeness, and in so sharp a tone that every one had turned.

"Not poverty," said Catherine. "But Stanhope Cottage was always sweet, though never so sweet as Beaudesfords has been."

"And is not!"

"Dear Beaudesfords," she answered gently, but

courageously, "perhaps there is something wrong here, some unnatural element just now, or else we should all be so happy in this heavenly place, being alive and well, and with such beautiful weather." And she went back to lopping her roses; while Beaudesfords repeated her words, "Some unnatural element" — and strolled down the path, his chin upon his breast.

"Beaudesfords is dyspeptic," said Gaston. "I have seen the time myself when an apple-dumpling changed the face of creation."

Rose sprang down the path after him at the words, and brought him back with her to inspect the basket. "It is absurd to say you have dyspepsia," she cried. "Don't you dare to be ill! There is enough fever round already. The houses down in the Great Wood are all reeking with typhus."

"My poor boy," said Mrs. Stanhope, with more motherliness than she was accustomed to exhibit, and putting her hands in his curls as he knelt with Rose, "I am a little worried about you now. I am afraid you are not well."

"Don't agitate yourself about me, Mamma Stanhope," he answered, with a quick change of manner, taking her hand and kissing it. "You

are far too good to me. I never had a mother of my own. But you are dearer than a dozen. What a kind and wise little woman! But, for all that, you have made some mistakes in your life."

"Come, come!" cried Rose: "will Catherine suffer you to sentimentalize over Mamma Stanhope in this way? A man cannot marry his grandmother! Lose yourself in these treasures, my friend. Shakespeare for a dime; Cæsar at half the money. Such is fame! What a feast of plaster and flow of pennies this would have been for us once, Catherine, when it cost us such arguments to decide how to spend our allowance of fourpence-ha'penny, and an image-boy was a messenger of the gods! Look at this Madonna; and here is Rachel herself. Think of the priceless Phèdre for two shillings!"

"The chiefest pose in all the 'slim Hebrew's' repertory for two shillings," repeated Gaston, looking over their shoulders.

"And dear at any money!" cried Beaufords, rising. "Tell me the value of any representation of perjury and passion! Are unfaithful wives so rare that they should be preserved and sealed like flies in amber? What was Phèdre?"

A woman possessed by supernatural evil, as another woman was possessed by seven devils. Possessed by Venus, maddened by Venus — her sole claim that she is the ideal and apotheosis of every woman that has been, that is, that ever will be false to the husband to whom she pledged her faith!" As he spoke, he flung down the little image that he had held, and with his foot crushed it to fragments, then gathered up the fragments at a stroke and tossed them into the little lake, the wind of their motion whistling by Catherine's face as she sat upon the edgestone that bounded its border in that portion, while sharpening her knife, and not once glancing aside or up. Gaston saw the dull, determined look settling over her features, as the waters flashed to meet the broken fragments; and Beaudesfords saw it too, and stood and stayed to survey it a long, scornful moment. She slowly raised her eyes, aware of his: he might have read in them her indignant protest, her asseverance of truthful endeavor, her prayer for help, but he saw there only a defiant declaration.

"Well, my friends," continued Beaudesfords, directly, before they had well taken breath after his outbreak, "tell Mrs. Grey to pay our wayfarer

for my spoliation ; and, as we have had enough of heroics, I think I will go and explore into the nature of this fever-district that Rose tells us about."

"Now, for pity's sake, do be careful, Beaudesfords!" cried Caroline. "Don't be bringing home the infection, and having us all down with the disease!"

"Entertain no fears," said Beaudesfords. "Do you want I should promise you that, henceforth, I will myself monopolize all the ill things, as heretofore I have monopolized all the good things, of this life?"

Hope departed from Catherine as she heard Beaudesfords saying these taunting things. She had been asking herself on that same afternoon, if, since she could do no better, it were not even best to go to him herself, to say to him: "My friend, a year ago we were so happy together! I revered you, my affection grew with the days. Now a fatal influence overshadows us: not a passion, since I will not yield to it; not a love, since I despise it, since I detest myself and its object equally. To-day it seems that all is lost but honor. Yet you, by taking me away, can save to me peace, happiness, reason." Possibly

she would not have shaped her cry in any such grandiloquent phrase ; but that would have been its meaning ; and he, perhaps, at any other time, would have received it kindly, since he had married her knowing love was absent, accepting then her own terms, and feeling not the full right to complain if his mistake worked woe. But now, when there had been made such a revolution of all the old sweetness in his nature, while he was in this vindictive and savage mood, she, not wholly innocent, dared not appeal to him : she feared him, and would have abased herself in the dust before him, uncertain if he would not trample upon her.

XVII.

It was a wild week to Catherine. She recalled without ceasing what Beaudesfords had said of Phèdre ; and it appeared to her that she was only a modern counterpart of that wretched being herself, weakened with the dilution of civilized blood, but as wanton, as wicked, as demon-driven. She moved about the house, possibly more stonily cold than ever, but glad at least that her mother and sisters were too deeply occupied with their own preparations for approaching gayeties to give heed to the tragedy taking place beneath their eyes.

And would Gaston go if she implored him ? It came to that at last. Very likely — provided she went with him. What could she do but die, hunted to the death by both these cruel men !

But had Gaston no gratitude, no love for Beaudesfords, no noble side that would give her the help which now she dared not ask from the other ?

Was it to be believed that, if she begged of him this one and only thing, — if she besought him not to drag her into certain misery, but to leave her, — he would refuse it? As she thought of it, forgetting that the entreaty was confession, it grew already real to her, — the words she would say, his reply, their farewell, — or peradventure no reply, nothing but absence, — peace then, and by and by eternity. Her brain grew clear as if filled with a great light, she fell into her first unhaunted slumber for many a weary midnight, and it was on the next day that she wrote, — wrote in the whirl of that inner tumult in which she had lived of late, which made it impossible for her to question or weigh, to wonder if, instead of love, it were not rather hatred, and pity because of the hatred, that this man made her feel when she desperately folded her paper, to consider if she were not ruled by a mere fascination of habit, to ask what it meant that she should seek thus to preserve Beaudesfords' peace at the cost of Gaston's. It is true that it occurred to her that the woman who had the strength to make such a request had also the strength to recover herself without any request at all, but she put the thought away: she chose to write; it was the

single sacrifice that she would make to Gaston — to whom she had no right to sacrifice at all.

Only one person saw that note. It was not long. But could it have been any thing else than an outpouring of all that which had scorched and seared her heart and soul? Imploring Gaston to grant her prayer by all their mutual emotion, by all their gratitude to Beaudesfords, did not the prayer itself attest whatever the eagerest lover longs to hear? Perhaps, — since this was all, the first word and the last, she said, — as once in the conservatory she had said or dreamed before, — greeting and farewell, — perhaps since this closed all the rest, and rolled the stone against the tomb, she wrote what, an hour later, she would have given her best hopes of the hereafter not to have written at all. For whether the words were passionate acknowledgment of what once was but now existed no longer, or whether they were slight and feeble phrases of request, — to her proud soul, when the reaction came, the mere pencilling of them seemed a shameful crime. She did not direct her note, or seal it: it was unnecessary when Gaston was to receive it from herself. She never paused to think how dangerous a step she had taken, nor that black and white

are inflexible witnesses, but went down to dinner with the note hidden in her handkerchief,—wearing a radiant face, persuaded she was safe.

Catherine had remembered that it was Beaudesfords who always rose from table to hold the door open while Mrs. Stanhope and her daughters passed out, on occasions when the gentlemen lingered over their wine, as lately they had frequently done. And, sitting next Gaston, when she rose she laid the note upon his hand as it rested along his knee just beneath the cloth. It seemed to her, as she performed it, so cowardly and contemptible and reprehensible an action, that she sickened. Her heart gave a deadly leap as she left the note: she grew so pale that Gaston himself had sprung to the door before Beaudesfords had more than risen; and then Beaudesfords, undisturbed and cool, resumed his seat. But as he did so, the little note, that had fluttered to the floor unheeded, caught his eye: he stooped and raised it, uncertain to whom it belonged. He glanced at Catherine; and with the glance, as if a whole revelation had been suddenly made, he took his wallet out and dropped the note therein, and hid it again in his breast-pocket.

Catherine had seen it all. She hesitated an

instant at the door, — hesitated in that gracious and slow-moulded way of hers: she turned to go back and demand it, but at that moment two gentlemen were conducted through the hall to Beaudesfords' den, as his private business-room was called; and before she could gather wits or words Beaudesfords had excused himself to Gaston, and had passed out through another door to join the strangers. And Catherine felt that she had signed her own death-warrant.

XVIII.

WHEN Beaudesfords appeared in the drawing-room some two hours later, his face was as pale as Catherine's. He had been using camphor-water freely, and he shook an atmosphere of it around himself from his handkerchief as he lifted the curtain of the inner room.

"I should think you were a whole hospital-ward!" cried Caroline.

"Are you ill, Beaudesfords?" asked Mamma Stanhope.

"Not exactly. A little."

"You ate nothing, I noticed," she began, with her stately sort of bustle. "You" —

"I have been down in the typhus-district. It is the reason I was away from home last night."

"Oh, Beaudesfords!" cried Rose. "And those strangers were" —

"My lawyers. I sent for them as soon as I discovered the malignant character of the disease where I had been."

“How absurdly you talk! As if”—

“I have been making my will, little Rose in Bloom. I sent for them—the lawyers—in case of accident. Since dinner the accident became a certainty”—

“What on earth do you mean, Beaudesfords? A certainty?” cried Caroline.

“To me! Perhaps not to another. On the whole, I don’t know that a man can have a more enjoyable occupation than that of making his will. He disproves the old adage that you can’t have your cake and eat it too; for he gives away every thing, and keeps it notwithstanding.”

“But, my dear boy,” said Mrs. Stanhope imperatively, “I can’t listen to any such badinage. Lawyers and wills and typhuses! Those wretched people down there in the Great Wood have preyed upon your feelings, and wrought you into a nervous headache that you would persuade yourself, as all men do, must be incurable. You will drink this strong tea and be better.”

“Thank you, Mamma Stanhope. You are as good as a doctor. Nevertheless, I shall have Ruthven, and I shall take my own old rooms again,—the St. Veronica suite, you know,—so that if I have brought home the confounded in-

fection, as Caroline prophesied the other day, Catherine may be safe."

"Oh, Beaudesfords!" cried Catherine. And then she stopped, for it came over her in a burning rush from head to foot where it was possible he might have read those last three words. "Oh, Beaudesfords!" she cried again. But she dared say no more; for, in spite of his pleasantry, his eye was as glittering as an eagle's. But if he were ill, and she were to be shut out in this way, — she stood up suddenly, and as suddenly sat down again, believing that she was growing wild.

"By the way, Gaston," said Beaudesfords then, "I have left you the St. Veronica."

Gaston answered nothing.

"The St. Veronica and half my fortune, old boy. It is not your fault if you survive me. The other half I leave, as the will says, to my dear and honored wife."

Gaston and Catherine alone understood the sarcasm of tone and speech, knowing its every word was studied.

Then Beaudesfords set down his teacup, and arose.

"If you will send for Ruthven, Mamma Stan-

hope," said he, "I will go to my quarters. Good-by, little Rose,—I think you would be sorry if any thing happened to me. That is the polite euphemism, is it not? Don't follow me, friends. I am to be left alone. Frye sleeps in the room beyond,—and sleeps soundly too,—the door is closed, and I ring if I need him. I want no attendance, please. Be sure that I am obeyed."

"But, Beaudesfords—I believe you are delirious already!" exclaimed Caroline. "What sort of directions for a man threatened with a fever! Why, when I am sick, I want everybody!"

"Be sure that I am obeyed," replied Beaudesfords, in his gentlest, firmest tone. "Make as merry as you may, till I return to make merry with you. Good-night." He lifted the silken curtains, and they fell behind him heavily, swinging and subsiding in their long folds; and as Catherine watched them, it flashed upon her, with swift portent and premonition, that over Beaudesfords' bright head they were never to part again.

XIX.

BEAUDESFORDS had scarcely entered the so long unused room, which now, according to his previous order, he found prepared for him,—and which once he had fitted up in a splendor of boyish caprice, saying that, if the St. Veronica could no longer hang in a cathedral niche, she should at least look down on private and lay magnificence,—when there was a tap upon the door, it was pushed open, and Catherine had entered.

Her first glance showed her Beaudesfords bending over a portfolio that lay on a little stand of writing-materials near the head of the bed, while he hid his wallet—doubtless with her note in it, she believed—between the portfolio leaves. She hardly noticed the corpse-like whiteness of his face, nor the peculiar rigidity of his movements, as if the nerves of volition were strained to their last pitch of endurance, so in the instant did she long for some word wicked enough, some cabalism,

witchcraft, diabolism, strong enough to possess for her the thing that wallet held, to destroy it, to annihilate it, — that note ! That writing which was not to save her happiness, but to ruin Beaudesfords' ! That writing which, at this moment, appeared to her to be a lie, and the record of a lie, from beginning to end ! It may be that the actual longing was strong enough virtually ; for all at once, as if relieved of a nightmare's pressure, she asked what odds it made to her how long Gaston stayed in the place ? Was she not the wife of Beaudesfords, honored and honoring, seeking his happiness ? Could she not entertain his friends, one or another, indifferently ? Did not his very right to her duty, his right as a husband, give him the dignity and manhood she loved ? What nobility he had displayed, what loftiness, — glad now to die and give the thing he valued most to the one who would have spoiled him of it, — magnanimity of which the other man, little better than a beggar on his bounty, no better than a traitor to his faith, was destitute and naked ! And as she saw Beaudesfords' nature take its peerless proportions, Gaston's shrank to a recreant shape, and disappeared in nothingness. It seemed to her as if some lightning-stroke had

struck her, and remade her in that swift moment, — as if she had been born again another woman with another heart! If she could only get back that note unread, that lie unuttered, — if now she could but be Beaudesfords' own, henceforth and for ever!

“Catherine!” exclaimed her husband, coming towards her. “Here! when I forbade it?”

“Oh, Beaudesfords, if you will only let me stay!” she cried, clasping her hands.

“When I forbade it?”

“I cannot have you ill and keep away myself,” she said hotly. “I must be with you! I am your wife! I claim my right!”

“You are my wife,” he said. “And it is fit you should remind me of it.”

“Do not speak to me so, Beaudesfords! If you are ill, I must — I must take care of you! Oh, Beaudesfords, if you love me!”

“And you dare — you dare to say it!”

Catherine never could rehearse that scene exactly to her own memory, as mere remembrance. Trying to recall it, she no longer remembered, she lived it! She was in it, it wrapped her like the whirlwind, she breathed it over again. Again she heard his voice in her ears, —

“And you dare, — you dare to say it!” Again she was caught in his arms, pressed close, close to his convulsive heart; her face, her hands, her cheeks, her forehead, her mouth, covered with great passionate kisses. “Good-by, good-by, my darling!” she could hear him murmur, all bitterness melted away. “God knows, God knows I love you!” and the door was locked between them.

She crouched there beside the door, listening to his hurried walk, that never ceased till Mrs. Stanhope brought Dr. Ruthven to the place. The one was allowed entrance, the other excluded by a sign and without a word, — for Beaudesfords had his own idea, in sending for the Doctor, intending perhaps that to-night’s illness should answer for to-morrow’s discovery; and Catherine heard no more, except as the Doctor told her.

Beaudesfords was ill, Dr. Ruthven said; a slight attack; nothing serious, though; no typhus whatever. His nerves had been wrought upon by something or other till he was half beside himself. He must be humored: that had been always necessary with a Beaudesfords. It had been one of his crotchets, ever since he was a boy, to isolate himself if he were ill. The wild creatures of the

woods felt the same. It only showed how near he was to Nature. He would ring if he wanted any thing: at present, he demanded to be left absolutely alone. If he should become any worse, they would need to reason with him. Meanwhile, a composing powder. Then Dr. Ruthven recommended, with a somewhat ominous voice, that servants should be stationed in Frye's room, to hear if Beaudesfords expressed a wish, or to assist Frye, if need were; and he promised to be in again by daybreak, — for the Doctor had reached that age when men think it a merit in them to rise before the sun. And, after that, the good man went home, persuaded that, as he could detect nothing alarming ailing his patient, Beaudesfords was only preparing, by the aid of his slight indisposition, a fright for Gaston and my lady that would do them both good to the end of their lives, and heartily willing to co-operate with him to the extent of his deceptive abilities, which, as he had already proved, were not small.

It was a June night of heavy dews. As the starlight entered and made her a companion of strange shadows, Catherine walked silently up and down the hall, hearkening every now and then for some word or signal from within the

room. But none came; and the hours grew long and longer, while silver clocks chimed them to one another all down the suites of rooms, and up the distant stairways. The light burned till broad day in the western wing. Mrs. Stanhope and Rose came gently down, to see how all was going, when midnight had just passed. Catherine sent them back, and still walked along the tufted mattings, with her weary thoughts and the star-cast shadows for companions. Not a sound, not a murmur, not a breath, came from the sick man's room. Beaudesfords slept, she said to herself: he would waken in the morning, — after such refreshing slumber, waken well. If only she could get that note of hers before he should have read it, he would waken well and happy. He had not read it yet, she said. She felt confident of that: his honor did not sit so lightly on Beaudesfords as to let him open a paper belonging to another. There had not come a rustle to indicate as much, since she had waited there; and what time had he had before? Forgetting what he had said in the drawing-room about an accident's becoming a certainty, or else not having comprehended then the meaning of his words, — forgetting, too, that a goaded and crazed curiosity

might be as potent an element as honor,—forgetting, in the agitation of the hour, that that note had not been addressed to another or to any one. Her solicitude began to take the shape of a mania concerning the thing. If she could but get it back in her possession, what a bright and cheerful day lay before her! What a life! What usefulness, and what delight, to wander hand in hand with her husband down its slope! How she would go to Beaudesfords herself, without a blush, and tell him this secret of hers,—this thing that she had learned since purple twilight had shut down over all the rosy world! She walked the long hall more proudly, with an assured step. She answered the mute challenge of those phantom-like portraits on the wall, with their dim eyes following her in the starlight,—she also was an honest, happy Beaudesfords! Not once did she think of Gaston: she only wept that she had delayed her happiness so long.

Then Catherine questioned with herself if it were not practicable for her to obtain that note, after all. If he slept, and she stole it from the portfolio, and he never knew for years and years the danger they had escaped! The idea was no sooner hers than she commenced making it a

fact, going swiftly up into her own sitting-room — where Olympe slumbered loudly, half slipped from the great chair,—and preparing a similar piece of paper to put in its place when she should have laid hands upon the original.

Down again: all was still. Softly opening the long hall casement and creeping across the veranda, over the steps, and out upon the dewy garden-paths. She remembered that Beaufords had set his own casement ajar: she saw it now as it swung half-open, guarded by its two mute sentinels of towering trees. She was sure then that he slept. Nothing disturbed the hush of night that hung over the garden. The Triton blew his horn, and its water-drops flashed faint and far into the little lake; the leaves rustled gently and viewlessly among themselves; now and then a dew-drop fell and pattered from one to another; now and then a puff of wind shook them all to fragrance, and passed. The great heavy-headed roses slept beside the way; the honeysuckle's perfect breath enriched the wind that crept across the alleys. Overhead the large soft summer stars seemed to wheel in a languid dream. You could fancy that from their vast heights they already saw the morning dawn,—

but here it was cool, dark, dewy, and delicious night. Catherine swept through the dew-sweet alleys, her gown gathered about her, pushed further open the casement that she sought, stepped in. The light burned dimly there, would expire ere long. She could just see Beaudesfords by the faint ray, as she stood there a moment, while the same ray fell on her face and form framed by the night behind; could see him lying back upon his pillow, with his eyes closed, and breathing the heavy breath of one who forgets fatigue. Noiseless, with haste, she stole to the little stand near his bed, tore open the portfolio, found the wallet—except for some bank-bills—empty. She stifled the cry that rose to her lips,—ah, he knew all, then! She turned, and would have gone; but something, that irresistible finger of fate, it seemed to her, when by and by its remembrance gave her a sort of solace, compelled her for one moment yet to stay, to bend above Beaudesfords, careless whether he woke or not, to press her lips gently, lingeringly, long, upon his forehead, and then, without a look behind her, she stole away as she had come, through the still and sleeping garden, while the cry of a watchdog was answered by that of some more distant

farm, till the hillsides swallowed all the baying echoes in silence.

When the sound of her last footfall had ceased upon the path, Beaudesfords slowly dragged himself up to the dull light and held there, to read its script once more, the paper in his hand,—a letter written and addressed to her, enclosing in its leaves that fatal note which she had come to seek and come too late. He felt still that soft and lingering kiss upon his forehead,—a kiss of pity, forsooth! and he desired no pity. Yet, in spite of that, he held his hand a little while above it, as if the common air might wipe its seal away.

“Catherine,” Beaudesfords had written, “I can refuse you nothing. And is there any thing of which I would rob Gaston? See,—I have discovered at last the secret between you. I should have known it earlier. If I stole my knowledge—I am about to pay the old penalty of theft. It was my fault that I ever came between you. I am going now to leave you. My darling,—I have found life sweet,—how sweet!—O God, how sweet! Yet I can bear to surrender it, because after this there is another,—and there, there, there, you will be mine! Though your beautiful flesh be his, your soul

shall be mine! through all the ages of eternity shall be mine! I am assured of it, I can wait for it, I shall have bought it with my blood!"

He lay a little while, when he had finished reading it, with the letter underneath his face, as if in itself it were something dear to him. Then he half rose, seeing the candle flicker and fearing lest the light should die first and leave him to make failure in the dark,—a moment too late, for, as he thought of it, the flame fell. He sank back, and as one hour and another went by he lay there in the dusk till twilight began to sift across it,—a twilight, he felt, that was to usher in no common day for him, but was rather the aurora of that divine dawning whose day was to have no end. The world had already begun to recede from him, the agony of renunciation had passed into an obscure aching, at last that in turn was stilled: he had abandoned all; and now his great freeholds, his manhood and strength and beauty, his wife, his friend, his troops of friends, could not with all their intertangled fibres hold his spirit down. It was not indifference that possessed him, it was eagerness,—eagerness to be up and away. Now in the misty mood of this soft half-light, before the sunlight should make

the bright earth an actual thing once more, he must make haste to be gone: he took up the tiny knife that lay sharp and glittering beside him, stretched out his bared arm with its hand clenched till the veins stood forth large and livid, and then the knife had done its work and had fallen on the coverlet, and a purple stream was gushing silently down and away with his life. He had grasped the folded letter in his other hand, and he lay now with his eyes upon the sweet rejoicing eyes of the St. Veronica, shining softly and dimly as a ghost in the gloom, before him and above him on the wall. "It is my expiation," said Beaufords to himself. "I do no wrong now — it cannot be. I did wrong then, two years ago and over: I forgot every one but myself, — now I forget myself. They, too, will forget me, — they will smile and be happy, — the summer weather will make them glad again, the winter snows shall not chill them. Me, only, shall they chill, cold long before. God bless them — oh, God bless them! Ah, ah, how softly you desert me, treacherous life! Drop by drop, — and one drop leaves me here, — and between that and the next I go — for the light fails — the day dies — I see nothing but that face, sweet face, stamped in

upon my soul, shining out of the dark — Catherine — whom I love ” —

The morning wind had long since begun to breathe far off in the listening night: now it quivered up the river-course and ruffled all the forest and the field, crept along the garden-aisles and under all the bosky shields of lightening green, trembled through the boughs of the great guardian firs as though through mighty harp-strings, blew in the open casement and lightly lifted all the yellow locks upon that ivory forehead. Then it swept out again into the garden, waiting in the gray of dawn with its fragrance and freshness and sparkle; for every thing there told of motion and life and joy, and here all things waited for Death.

XX.

THE snowy silken curtains had been loosed from their cords of gold, and only swayed gently in the breeze that crept through the blinds, sweeping their heavy fringes along the floor, and filling the room with a soft and sacred gloom, as Gaston still stood there gazing down at Beaudesfords lying in the filtered light which made the atmosphere about him seem like that of some other world. The house was without a sound; for Caroline's hysterics, and Mrs. Stanhope's heavy steps to and fro in her own room, were hushed by closed doors and distance. Beaudesfords lay, as he had been left in Dr. Ruthven's hurried absence, like one who sleeps upon his pillow, and not yet robed in the final habiliments, for the people had said, in their ghastly jargon, that it would be easier to clothe one in that condition to-morrow than to-day; nor had the warmth of life quite ebbed in these two hours. That horrid

sharpness which the features of the dead, the faint, and the cataleptic share alike, had slowly and entirely passed away, the eyelids had partially closed, an utter calm lay on the white face, and something so like a smile had settled round those chiselled lips, that it seemed now far more the sweet slumber of fatigue than that eternal sleep which knows no waking in the flesh. There was a majesty about that prostrate form with which not all the helplessness that wraps the dead could do away,—that abandoned helplessness which cannot give back look for look, which is forced to suffer the reading of secrets hidden once by bloom and smile and sparkle, but now all plainly written to the eye that knows the cipher,—that helplessness which leaves the dead at the mercy of the gazer, exposed to love or scorn alike. This majesty of Beaudesfords' was something now superior to clay or to corruption: as if the monarch of creation, Death, which is the life everlasting, held his state in such dust that day.

But while he gazed upon this mould of death, a living flame seemed to have heated Gaston's memory: every day, every hour, every word of his intercourse with Beaudesfords started up in it complete, and their black shadows stalked through

this fiery furnace, as if to assure him of their immortality, and of the fact that he should never be forgotten by them in their haunting power. The wrongs he had done the dead man looked him in the face with their evil eyes, the treachery to his friend upbuoyed all these wrongs like an element to which they were native,—a heavy, leaden element into which they could never sink and drown fathoms deep. Beaudesfords' long service of loving-kindness became like the festering wound of a poisoned blade, one sharp and bitter agony of remembrance. Such confused and terrible images were shaping themselves in his mind, like the phantasmal outlines of those wavering exhalations that rise from regions of stagnant marshes, that he began to fear lest his reason reeled already, and he should expiate his folly and his sin in a mad-house.

But through it all, as I have said, through the frenzy of sorrow and shame and dread and passion, one thought domineered, kept piercing him again and again with its thrill of delicious pain,—every thing whirled and centred about it, every thing came back to it, he opened his arms and took it and hugged it to his heart: it was this, that whether Beaudesfords lived or Beaudesfords

were dead, Catherine and Gaston loved each other !

Whether Beaudesfords' own will had put a period to the light of day that shone for him, — or whether Catherine's strong, firm hand it was that had guided home that little knife, — the deed was done, the barrier was down, there was nothing now between the two, the way was clear before them for all earthly bliss ; and when Death took them, — dearest delight of all ! — their dust should mingle into one dust. For beyond death Gaston never looked : he believed nothing but the evidence of the senses. "There is a sixth sense," said a witty Frenchman, "the sense of the ideal ; and d'Holbach had but five senses." Gaston had no more. He had never seen the grand shadows of futurity with any eye of faith : to him the hereafter was only a vast void. He meant all the more to suck the honey from each moment as it became the present : he needed to hear with his own ears the voice of some actual angel of the resurrection declare, "And yet the dead do rise !"

Perhaps Gaston was trying himself too far in calling up this throng of dark and sad recollections, of intentions rosily glowing with hope and rapture, while looking down on that still face

below, which he, and none other, had robbed of life. But he knew that, so long as he lived on the solid earth, that face, the immaterial counterpart of that face, must hang like a dreadful mask perpetually between him and the world; and if now, at its first and strongest, he met it and blunted all the anguish it could yield, it would afterwards become of no more import than any face-cloth tossed aside by the rifler of a grave. But, when Gaston said that, a taunting voice seemed to speak close beside his ear, and tell him that he was not rifling a grave, he was filling one; and then another voice returned, like a mocking antiphon, that he was rifling it even of its good name. For was he not suffering Beaudesfords' name to be sent abroad on the winds blasted with the stigma of suicide? And that when he knew, and none better, that yonder white hand upon the wall had severed the vein, that yonder face, that blotch of beauty in the portrait there, had darkened while the deed was doing. If it was not thus — if — but there Gaston's courage stayed — he had loved Beaudesfords — strange contravention of his being, he loved him still — he feared to think of what it could have been that had spurred his own hand to such a thrust, he

absolutely dared not look at that moment when Beaudesfords staggered out of the world because, finding his wife worthless and his friend false, the foundations of life gave way beneath him. The surprise and the contempt of this dead man were strokes that he alive had no courage to meet: he evaded all the subject by fastening upon that hand in the portrait; a white hand, — but red last night, he said. And what of that? he said. We make the act hideous by the name of murder; but what signifies a name? Was life, after all, so precious a boon — for himself, he had never until now found it worth the keeping, — so cruel a loss, a matter of such moment, that its taker must needs be a fiend? A fair fiend here, — ah, heavens, how fair! — how sweet the smile, how exquisite the grace, how rare the tints! — those locks of palest gold, that sapphire sheen in the eye, that bloom upon the cheeks like a wild-rose grown in happy shadow, those lips that pouted for their lover's kiss — ah, once, once! Be she however false, be she however base, be she twice as foul as she was fair, in spite of sin or shame or life or death he loved her! It was time that Gaston looked to his reason lest it reeled. Stone walls never shut in from further

outraging the world a fitter subject than this man when he had lost his last perception of right or wrong ; when honor, that runs along the flashing of a soldier's sword, had ceased to have an existence for him ; when virtue had become a thing of no account ; when the embrace of a presumed murderess allured and did not repel him ; when the moral leprosy, engendered by the mind's familiar contact with possible sin in the future, had penetrated the brain with its foul loathsomeness and disease, till it had lost polarity and meridian, and did not know heaven from hell.

The bright breeze, creeping over the bosom of the blossoms in the garden, came bustling into the room again, lifting the drapery of the casement, and bringing Beaudesfords word of the beautiful world outside, — of the world he had renounced but two hours since, of the cedarn alleys full of shadow, where he had wandered when first his heart swelled with love for Catherine, of the flowers whose fragrance was not so fragrant in his fancy then as Catherine's lips, of the birds whose most delicate melody was less melodious than her voice had been, but all of which he had held dear to him with the strong love he had of the vivid real earth, and God's hand

visible there. The breeze blew lightly in, it curled among the silken curtains, it lifted the lock on Beaudesfords' marble forehead, mocking life as it could ; it poured its gay message into his silent ear, it made all the room fresh and sweet with its burden. But Beaudesfords heard and Gaston heeded nothing, the one in his white icy slumber, the other in his black hot reverie. And while the breeze blew and rioted there, and shook down the petals from the silver tripod of red roses, a footfall had sounded on the carpet,—not that step light as the breeze itself on the summer turf,—but the heavy foot that has stumbled upon a grave ; and Catherine stood again on the other side of that still sleeper, with all the curtains looped away between them from the carved pearl of their supports.

Gaston did not glance at her at first : he was still gazing at the portrait over her head, the portrait full of such palpitating color, such beauty and such life. For many minutes after he was aware of Catherine's presence he still kept his eyes on the painting, with a vicious intensity, till the lovely face might have been fixed, as if with fire, upon their retina. When at length he lowered his gaze towards Catherine herself, the

earth seemed to move from where he stood, seemed to quiver ever so slightly beneath his feet that failed him; for whether it were some power from his body, some faculty from his mind, some person from his world, something had vanished: what it was, he had no means of conjecturing; his heart was not beating, but trembling; his memory appeared all at once to encumber his mind like dead stuff, beneath the paralyzing potency of this inexplicable sensation. For that vision of a woman standing before him was an unfamiliar thing: it was no longer Catherine; or, if it was indeed the person of that portrait, it was she repeated in what ghostly medium, beneath the ray of what unearthly spectrum? Where had fled the radiances, the warm flesh-tints, the glory about her that always reminded you of light, as if a star had opened to let her forth? This woman was whiter than the form beneath her hand,—only the violet eyes looked out as if all heaven were shining into them.

It was the briefest space ere Gaston had himself in hand again, a space only long enough to shiver in; one of those lingering, curdling shivers with which gossips say that some foot treads on

the sod that is one day to bury you from the sight of the sun. But what had given him his bewildered pause was the recoil — with all his thoughts surging on in their certainty — in this new woman's face, as if day after day had lied to him, as if sunshine had grown blood-red, as if the earth were but a cloud and vapor, — the doubt, the dread, that she could never have done this deed, that Catherine could never have loved him. "Catherine!" he cried, and paused.

He had never called her so before. But it was her name; and there are times when people forget their ceremonies. A simple word; but its intonation bore such hope, such determination, such a claim, such proud, quick, pleased confidence, that its sound was an offence.

She had not heard him at the first. The full meaning of it did not overcome her till Gaston called her name the third time. Then she looked up, calm as only those are who rise great on great events, and meet life or death even-handed, an equal, asking no odds. "I think you forget," she said gently, "that you speak to the wife of Beaudesfords."

"His widow," said Gaston.

"Death cannot widow me of Beaudesfords,"

said Catherine, gently still. "I shall always be his wife."

"No more, no more!" suddenly cried the other, his dark face dark as a thunder-cloud, his eye heavy with lightnings and with rain. "Not his, but mine, — oh, mine!"

Was this the haughty Gaston, the self-repressed and silent man? Or was the so-long-pent lava-stream of that volcanic nature, now that the barrier was destroyed, pouring forth fused with its fierce central fire. It was not Catherine, though, that asked the question, — far too highly wrought herself to wonder at the same thing in another. She only drew back a little, with a quick anger as if her husband had been hurt through her, — an anger that passed like a mere flash upon the great stress of the so much stronger emotions with which she had been overwhelmed. And as for Gaston, he had not meant that any temptation should betray him to such lengths; he had not meant to see her, to speak with her, much less to claim her, for days or even months to come; he had a tigerish quality that loved to dally with its prey; and, so far as he had any plan of action at all, it was the scheme of commanding reverence from the fickle falsehood of a weak soul

for the superior strength of that manly nature that was constant to its friendship through all the labyrinths of passion; and it may be that he had besides a certain mantle of decorous and noble behavior to assume and deceive even himself. Yet now, when all these contending forces of rage and grief and horror, and desire and fear, overmastered him, he was not the demi-god he had believed himself to be: he had no more resistance than if an alien power from far without had seized him and bent him like a straw to its wicked will.

“Not his, but mine!” cried Gaston once again; for now that the first word had been spoken, the first glance given, he could not break too boldly, too utterly, the seal of his past silence. “We have endured, we have suffered. You are no longer bound,—the world, the whole world is before us,—mine while life lasts!” he said exultingly, and the great scar along his face leaped into light.

“And then?” asked Catherine, choking down the tremor in her tone, and speaking because it was time she should be heard, as even her exalted mood could perceive, and although it were in that presence.

“And then one dust! an everlasting sleep in one another’s arms!” he exclaimed, with a smile as triumphant as a sunburst.

“Thank God!” she said, more to herself than him. “It never could have been. I never could have cared for him!” and her involuntary shudder of disgust shook even the chill hand she held.

“Stop!” said Gaston, bending forward, and using such effort at control, in order to be calm, that it seemed to him it was turning him into iron. “Do you mean to say you never loved me?”

“Never!” answered Catherine, firmly. And her face flushed crimson and then grew white once more, as she blushed beneath the sting of such words spoken to Beaudesfords’ wife. “Never! I will speak the truth, though it is here and now. Speak it,” she said solemnly, “because it is here and now; as if this heart, on which I lay my hand, were God’s altar.” For Catherine, in the suffering of the night before, albeit unconsciously, had done with reserve. In reaching her right place; in recognizing the love whose silent growth had uprooted the noxious parasite and weed; in remembering, and gladly remembering, that she was the wife of Beaudesfords; in seeing now that,

though the bonds of flesh dissolved, the marriage of the spirit could never expire, — she stood upon a plane as far above this man and his words as heaven is above the earth. She had sinned in soul, but she had struggled; she had overcome; and he had only tempted. “If ever any delirium disturbed my fancy,” she said, “I saw it — long before this horror happened, — saw it for a delirium, detested it, escaped it. I escaped it. I have never loved — I know it now — I have never loved any one but him, my husband, — so lofty, so generous, so brave, so good, so pure! Oh, Beaudesfords, what is death between us?” she cried, forgetting Gaston’s existence then. “You waited for me so long, surely we can wait a little longer! Married for the moment only here? oh, it were sacrilege, with all eternity to be happy in! Nearer, nearer now than we ever were before, our love hallowed in heaven as it never was on earth, — not death, not fate, can separate us, — we are one! I shall hear and know and feel you in every breath I draw, in every thought, in every pulse, — summer mornings will seem to bring you back to me, — no night will be too high, with its heaven full of stars, for me to find you, — for oh! I love you, Beaudesfords! Beaudesfords, I love you!”

“Stop!” exclaimed Gaston again. He shut his teeth together a moment, as he listened, and writhed in strange torture. If this were Catherine, he could not then resist the impression that he was another than himself. “And yet it was your hand,” said he in a voice that she had never heard before, “your hand that prepared the way — that set us free — that opened for us both, last night, a path to paradise! Your hand that did this” —

“What!” murmured Catherine, in an awe-struck whisper, losing thought for the instant even of Beaudesfords’ loss. “Do you” —

Gaston pointed at the sleeper in his bed. His gesture denied the need of words.

For a moment she returned his gaze, speechless, with a kind of faint sickness. Not at the accusation; for the remembrance of the gardener’s words in the morning, which she had disregarded and forgotten, had rushed over her, and been spurned. “And is it possible, then,” she said, “that you can believe, can entertain — you — Gaston — his friend — Oh, you betrayed him! But can you think that I, his wife — that for the sake of any lawless love, though it were an archangel’s, I could take my husband’s life?”

“Which you did,” he said.

“And if I did,—which, O my God! declare to be the lie it is!—is any man so base as, knowing her, to take to his arms that adulteress in desire, that murderess in deed! Oh, go, go, go! leave such a place as this!” she commanded, in that hushed, clear tone of hers. “Oh that his last rest should be profaned by words like these!” and suddenly she faced him with her appalling whiteness and fire. “Go from the room!” she said. “Your presence is an insult to his ashes. Should you meet him in the world to come, one glance of his pure eye must needs annihilate you. Beneath contempt. Too low for hatred. Nothing!—Oh, Beaudesfords, come back, come back!” she cried, as Gaston tottered off, like one who has been struck, from where he had approached her. “Do not leave me in this cruel world alone! Come back, or take me with you, Beaudesfords, my own!” And she fell upon her knees, hiding her head against his cold heart, and wetting it with torrents of hot tears, the first tears she had shed, creeping up to lay her mouth on his lips, pouring between them the warm breath of her breast, that labored on his with sobs.

While the silence in the room was broken by nothing but those sobs, and Gaston towered there, at the foot of the bed, as immovable and rigid as if he had been cast in bronze, there were voices in the garden. It was the voice of Rose, who, while the other women had hidden themselves away with their grief, had been unable to follow them, but still hovered round the spot, now wringing her hands in a bewilderment of terror, now blind with bursts of weeping. She had gone down the garden, gathering, as she went, an armful of the great day-lilies, hardly knowing what she did, connecting them with a vague idea of that sacred chamber, and adding her heavy tears to the dew, of which the sun had not yet robbed their white and gold lustrousness. And then she had waited at the lower paling, quivering with hope and fear, and comprehending that Dr. Ruthven's hasty departure, after his orders to Frye to have the cordials at hand, and the hot flannels and ammonia and strong spirits ready for renewed effort, meant quick return and mighty possibilities. And suddenly she had cried out, as she saw him leap from his saddle at the nearest gate, — saw through her wet eyes not one, but twenty Dr. Ruthvens, with as many parcels

in as many arms, darting up the path, and never pausing at her ejaculation.

Perhaps the old Doctor was thinking within himself that, if all Nature took the disastrous thing so sweetly, if the garden that Beaudesfords had tended still blushed as brightly, the flowers bloomed, the winds, the skies, were just as fresh and fair, it must be because they were in the secret of God, and knew this thing that we call death to be no such blot upon the universe at all. But he was aware of thinking of nothing save that one moment's delay was ruin.

"It's the last resort!" he cried, hurrying on without staying, and not glancing at her enough to notice the eagerness that sparkled through her weeping eyes. "It's our dear boy's last chance. I couldn't trust any of the blundering idiots, after I had sent them for it: but if I can get some cordial into his stomach with this tube now, and then apply the battery,—such things are possible," he mumbled defiantly to himself, as he went, while Rose hung breathless on his words. "Faint with loss of blood,—suspended animation,—'twouldn't be the first instance,—Boerhaave gives a case of six hours. The battery 'll do no harm!"

“Oh, Doctor!” Rose began again, as well as she could for crying. “I’ve been standing on fire. It doesn’t seem like death in there, for I looked in, and Gaston was the only dreadful thing to see. And Mrs. Grey—oh, Doctor! Mrs. Grey just told me how he had a fall years and years ago, and bled so”—

“Good God, and I forgot it! Oh, I’m an old man! And he lying like death then for hours. Don’t lose a breath!” exclaimed Dr. Ruthven, springing forward as though he were twenty years younger, though you would have said he could move no faster than he was already moving. “Frye! Where’s Frye? Help me here! Every thing at hand? Don’t let us have any false alarm. Quiet, quiet! But Heaven grant”—

And suddenly Catherine sprung to her feet. “Call Ruthven!” she almost shrieked. “Send for him! Bring him!” And just at that moment the casement’s blind flew open, and the flood of glad light fell in and overlay the flame of her scarlet cheeks, and spread around her head like a glory. “Oh, come here! come here!” she said, as Dr. Ruthven himself hastened through from the garden. “His heart beats! it beats beneath my hand! oh, it beats, I tell you! and he breathes,

he breathes, I felt him ! Oh, Beaudesfords, you are not dead ! Speak to me, — look at me ! ”

Dr. Ruthven came up behind her while she clung there, and took her like a child, and seated her in a great sleepy-hollow of an arm-chair. “ Let no one speak in this room again while Death and I wrestle,” his manner said, but he uttered not a word ; for he had straightway forgotten every thing in that physiological passion that lit up for him the dark places where matter and spirit antagonize, yet join, as he strove to kindle the blood once more, to renew the breath, and, charging the battery along the whole course of the nerves, to strike them into action, till one wheel catching on another the entire machinery should be in motion with that life which Bichât asserted to be, after all, only the totality of the functions !

You might as well ask the great angels who watched the Almighty hands fashion that red clay upon Aornos, when the first man entered into the sacrament of life, as have asked Catherine what took place in the long hour that followed Dr. Ruthven’s return. It always seemed to her as if she had entered, during that time, into the secrets of eternity ; as if she had herself

been newly baptized from the fountain and source of being; as if she had been a witness of some awful rite of preternatural powers, and had seen behind the hollow masks of life and death the form of indestructible spirit; as if she had been shown the hidden mysteries of creation, and God had led her by the hand out of darkness into light. She was never exactly the same woman,—she had watched a soul come back from the vast shadowy brink, and seize its body. Some strong, crystallic current, too, had changed her from an amorphous existence into the perfect jewel, so to say. There was always something sweetly solemn in her face in those after-days: happiness had been purchased at a price that rendered it too costly for any thing but serious and conscious use. She never felt that she could afford to be happy in the irresponsible way which belonged to the birds and breezes and Rose.

But now, when at last a long tremble vibrated through Beaudesfords' frame, when a shiver shook his ashy lips, when the blood rushed into them and left them again, when the great, gleaming eyes opened bewilderedly a moment, closed, and then lifted again, and lay resting on the blue splendor of Catherine's, she believed heaven had

descended into the room, that the Lord of Life was working miracles there; and she stood transfixed, just as she had sprung forward with her clasped hands, and seeming to receive her own existence only from that smile which, from its faint beginning, grew and overspread the face of Beaudesfords with the old brilliance and beauty of earthly life.

They neither felt nor remembered, for the while, the presence of any other than themselves in the place: for him, the shadow of the grave slowly drawing off still obscured all but her; for her, all being, all identity of others, was lost in the light of Beaudesfords' gaze, as sunlight drowns the stars. They knew the meaning in each other's soul as their eyes hung there: he read her love, her confession, her prayer; she heard his answer ere the prayer was spoken. His lips were murmuring. "Come to me," he tried to say. She was there, sobbing out, "Oh, Beaudesfords, I am not fit to touch you!" hiding her face beside his, silent and breathless then, while he whispered: "I could not move, I could not stir,—the weight of my grave was on my breast. But I heard it all,—all you said to him. I should never have come back to life,—had it

been different,—had you not made such pulses leap,—had you not proved your faith to me,—had you not set my heart beating to yours,—oh, Catherine, my wife!”

No one heard them. Dr. Ruthven was crying aloud, without a qualm. Frye, faint with joy and fear, and his exertions in behalf of the master he had served from a child, had sunk upon the floor. Only Gaston looked at them, with a wild and burning look.

Not enough strength had returned to Beaufords to let him move his head. But, as if that look compelled them, his eyes wandered round and rested now on Gaston's. Wide and fervid eyes, full of fevered light, large drops of lustre,—they surveyed him; and their recognition was as blasting as the recognition of the judgment-day. No smile upon the lips, no softness on the brow, no woman-like reproach, no sorrowing loss, only that great, grave gaze that took the measure of the man's perfidy. It was the last blow,—the blow that Gaston could not bear. He had met much that morning. The shock when Beaufords' death was announced seemed to have reversed the currents of his blood. His head had whirled when he so suddenly found Catherine

free. His temples had been beating like trip-hammers ever since his self-assurance that the deed was hers, ever since he felt that, despite crime or shamelessness, his passion was the same, as dear and dearer. He had believed her hand red with guilt, and found it stainless. He had believed that Catherine's kisses were ripe for his gathering, — remembering, with long, piercing thrills, one night beneath the starlit shadows of the swinging tree-branches, the lips that bent, the lips that rose: an innocent night of a youth too long fled to be condemned, — and he had seen those kisses showered upon another man, a dead man. He had seen that dead man speak and gaze — Great God! how dead men gaze! He raised his hand to his head in a distracted way, — could he never rid himself of that stare? Must it hang there for ever before him, like a dazzling sun obliterating all the rest of the world? A slow tear gathered in Beaudesfords' eye. Gaston recalled vacantly, as he saw it, that the dead never weep, nor yet the dying. Just as vacantly, too, he recalled the fact of those glass spheres, in which an imprisoned drop of water changes and sublimates and swells to scalding vapor, till it bursts and shatters its shell to atoms; and in a

spasm of suffering it seemed to him as if that tear were something bursting in his own brain. He turned away, as the pain passed, with a low, idiotic laugh, no longer a man, but a maniac.

When, by and by, Beaudesfords went about the place again, a harmless creature followed him like a hound, never happy out of his sight, — one who had forgotten his own name, and remembered nothing but Beaudesfords'. If Catherine needed a punishment and a humiliation, she had it ever before her. They kept the forlorn wretch with them; Dr. Ruthven giving him especial care from day to day. The western wing was still his domicile when he needed quiet, but at all times he was a member of the household; and, though strong servants waited on him in his own apartments, he never needed other restraint than a pleasant word of Beaudesfords'. He knew none but gentle influences, sweet faces, the music of soft voices. He sailed with them upon the river, he hunted with Beaudesfords through the fields and woods. One day, when Beaudesfords had fallen upon his gun in vaulting across a hedge, lying for the moment quite still and faint, and had then suddenly opened his eyes, this follower,

who had stood gazing at him, began to quiver from head to foot, and fell down before him, calling out for his forgiveness and mercy,—taking up his thread of life where he had lost it, in that wondering look of Beaudesfords' clear eyes,—and Gaston was himself again, himself with a mighty change,—the dross was gone. And in the long hours of that noon, as they sat there, the two friends, loving each other with a love passing that of woman, made all bright between them. Thus a fleet season sped, and Gaston was a reasonable man once more: one atom too noble and too nobly trusted to cherish any sentiment of ill-will or any thing but veneration towards the woman who once swayed soul and sense alike,—a strange being, with his dark, scarred face and iron-gray head; a man with all his youthful fires and furies burned out of him, content enough with fate, and thankful for the sunshine that fell on him as he sat in the garden at Beaudesfords. One person, though, never ceased to observe him; for McRoy, the gardener, when he relieved his mistress of his suspicions, was nevertheless unable to believe Beaudesfords, as the latter assured him, that, being ill and with a disordered mind, which was certainly no more than the truth, he had inflicted

the wound with his own hand. He could not find it in his heart to credit the statement; and, as long as his lamp of life held out to burn, he would have turned its vigilant ray on Gaston, had not Gaston hindered such necessity when his old ambitions began to throb, as they did before that dream of passion clouded his days; and, drawn by the subsidence of revolution on his former field of action, he departed for the tropical regions, where he is still at work with a scheme as grand as the mountains he shall pierce and the seas he shall unite; while McRoy's inspection is turned over to the purlieus of the garden and the sparrows.

That garden at Beaudesfords is still more beautiful than any painted scene of a fairy spectacle. It is no wonder that Gaston loved his chair and cigar there; that Mrs. Stanhope's netting and Caroline's sofa are as much a part of it as the standards and the annuals; that the family fairly live there the livelong summer through. The broad beds of geranium still blossom in it like flames of sunrise fallen on the grass; the fragrant flower-fence spices the air all day; the roses revel together, and climb the trellis, and look back with blushing faces where the bees are

swinging in the great blue-bells of the campanula ; the sun-soaked cedarn alleys are still leading away into misty shadow ; the wind is still ravishing every bud of its odors ; the Triton is still blowing the sparkling water-streams from his horn, rocking the pickerel-weed and arrowhead and golden lilies on the ripple that he makes ; birds are twittering, leaves are rustling, a woman is singing : —

“The winds in the reeds and rushes,
The bees on the bells of thyme,
The birds on the myrtle-bushes,
The cicale above in the lime,
And the lizards below in the grass,
Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was
Listening to my sweet pipings.”

But sweeter music still than breezes make or bird-song chirrup through the place : it comes from where a golden-haired urchin sits upon the edgestone of the shallow lake, fishing with a pin, and soaking his bits of shoes into a pulp ; it comes from where Beaudesfords strolls up the path with a couple of cherubs on his shoulders,— lovely, laughing, rosy things, whose voices are the most delightful melody, as they shower their little handfuls of blossoms on the mother, who sits in her low garden-seat among the violets, where

presently they are tumbled, or as they pretend a tuneful fright of the dark-eyed, peach-bloomed little woman that frolics round them.

“Do you know,” said Beaudesfords to his wife, on the evening of one of these summer days, after the garden was still from the joyance and music of these voices,—“do you know that, though this happiness is so deep, so real, so intense, it is a very different thing from my old ideal of happiness? I have grown so still,—I think that that time I died I must have been made over.”

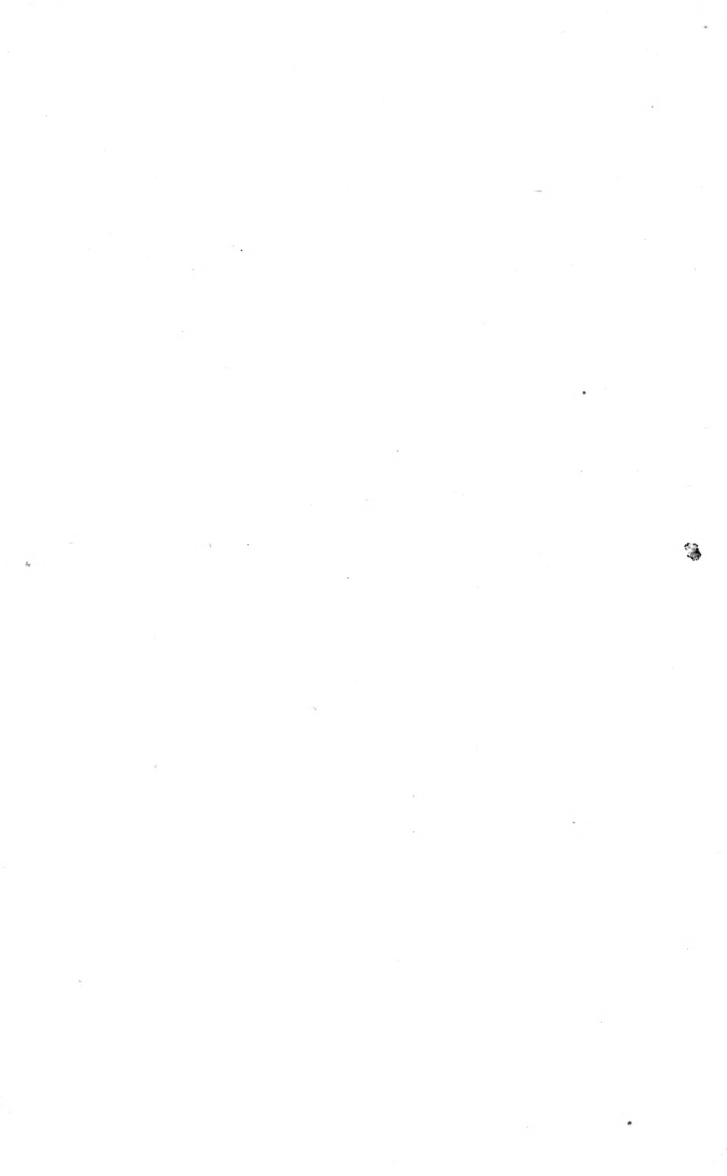
“It is not that you are more still,” said Catherine, “but only that you are at rest.”

“Yet there is no buoyancy left in me: my bubble is all from the outside. If you were not at my hand, if these little airy creatures dropped me, I should sink.” Without, the summer stars were trembling in the warm and rushing wind; within, the soft, low breathing from the room beyond seemed to rise and fall with the beating of their own hearts. You could not hear that regular, sweet sound without seeing the picture of the rosy little faces bathed in their dewy sleep. “Listen,” said Beaudesfords, “while we look out on this infinity that almost tempts one away, listen to the murmurings of our anchorage on earth.

What contradictions we have in us, — set in such perfect peace, so slight a thing may break it, — after all, it makes me tremble!”

“No, no,” she answered him. “You and I have been through the Valley of Death, — there was nothing there to tremble at. We can trust our future and our darlings in the hand that has been so tender with our past.”

“Let us go and look at them,” said Beaudestons. And, kneeling beside the little beds, they thanked God for their lot, and, while the seasons pass and old age comes, for the perpetual youth in life which children bring.



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